What did JESUS really teach ABOUT PRAYER?

EDWARD LEIGH PELL

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What Did Jesus Really Teach About Prayer?

By

EDWARD LEIGH PELL

Author of "What Did Jesus Really Teach About War?" "Our Troublesome Religious Questions," etc.

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Preface

SOMEWHERE in these pages I have said that when the average Christian mother takes up the task of teaching her children the elements of religion, she does not undertake to find out what Jesus taught: she only recalls what she was taught in her own childhood and teaches that. That was what her mother did before her, and her mother's mother, and so on all the way back to her heathen forebears. As a consequence the religious faith which most of us acquire in our childhood, instead of being the Christian faith, is a patchwork in which the teachings of Jesus are often lost in a maze of misinterpretations of His teachings, and pagan ideas which we inherited from our far-away ancestors. In the simple days of our fathers these early misteachings did little harm, for the reason that the average man went through life without coming into a light that would put them to the test. But to-day it is different. To-day our boys and girls are hardly out of sight of home before the fierce light of modern intelligence begins to beat down pitilessly upon all the precious faiths and fables of their childhood, and they soon discover that their religious faith will not bear inspection. Moreover, this is an age of hurry as well as of light, and when our young people discover that some of their religious

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ideas are unscientific and will not work, they don't stop to think; they jump to the conclusion that Christianity is unscientific and won't work, and with a gesture of finality, turn their backs upon the religion of their fathers.

We have been blaming the college for unsettling the faith of our young people, and no doubt some colleges deserve all the harsh things we have said about them; but it is time we were playing fair; it is time we were demanding of ourselves why we persist in sending our young people to college with a faith that will not bear the light. Modern science has indeed played havoc with our misinterpretations of Jesus and our pagan ideas, but it has yet to disturb a single teaching of Jesus. Why have we not taught them the teachings of Jesus?

More than one great secular paper has recently expressed the opinion that what this country needs most of all is an old-time revival of religion. No doubt this is true, but what this country needs *first* of all, is a revival of faith that will make a real revival of religion possible. And certainly, if our faith is to be revived, we must look after the foundations of faith upon which we are trying to stand. We must get rid of the stones that are crumbling—our misinterpretations of Jesus and our pagan ideas—and we must put in their place the everlasting granite truths of Jesus.

* * * * * *

In this book I have tried to answer what to my mind is one of the most pressing religious questions of the present moment. The greatest obstacle to the progress of religion in this age is the weakness of our appeal for Christ. Unquestionably this weakness is due to our unsatisfactory religious experience. And the religious experience of the average Christian nowadays is his experience with prayer, which, as everybody knows, is pathetic.

I have spoken of the foundations of faith. Let me change my figure for a moment to the chain of faith. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The weakest link in our modern chain of faith is prayer. This is largely due to the fact that it contains more pagan ideas—more clay—mixed with the pure gold of Christian belief than is to be found in any other link.

As I have tried to show in this volume, when a man's religious faith begins to break down it usually begins at this point. This is especially noticeable at college, where most of our breakdowns of faith begin. If John goes to college with a strong link of prayer—if his conception of prayer is Christian and has the support of his own experience (instead of being largely pagan, in which case his own experience gives it the lie)—if he can say that his experience with prayer has proved that it is what his mother claimed for it—his chain of faith is likely to hold together, no matter what

assaults may be made upon it. But if, when the fierce light of college begins to beat pitilessly upon it, he discovers that his link of prayer and his experience with prayer contradict each other, all that the enemy of his faith will need to do will be to give that link one short, sharp blow with his little hammer. Before sunset his poor broken chain will go to the scrap-heap.

To every one who has studied the present appalling drift away from religion, it is plain that if we are going to save the faith of humanity in God we must save its faith in a prayer-answering God. And to those who have studied the present popular conception of prayer, it is just as plain that if we are going to save the faith of men in a prayer-answering God we have got to remove from the present popular chain of faith this worthless, incohesive mixture of Christian and pagan ideas, and put in its place the pure gold of Christ's own teaching about prayer. First of all we must bravely face the bitter fact that prayer as it is popularly understood is a failure. And having done this we must go further and show that it is a failure, not because of the Christianity that is in it, but because of the paganism that is in it. And then we must make clear the distinction between pagan prayer, as it is so often practiced among Christians, and Christian prayer.

Unquestionably pagan prayer is a failure. It rests upon nothing but credulity. It violates our

reason and our intelligence. It ignores the facts of science and of human experience. It ignores the nature of God. It even tries to make God reverse Himself. But Christian prayer, as I have attempted to show in these pages, is the very opposite of pagan prayer. Christian prayer appeals to our reason and our intelligence. It agrees with the facts of science and of human experience. It is not an effort to reverse God to bring Him in line with our own will; it is an effort to reverse ourselves to bring us in line with His will.

And it has never failed. So long as men looked upon God as an irresponsible autocrat from whom they might get what they wanted by hook or crook, by begging or bribing or teasing, prayer was a failure. But ever since Jesus began to turn men from their pagan ways and to show them how to go and unbosom themselves to the Father, prayer has been a success. It is the greatest success there is in the world to-day.

E. L. P.

Richmond, Va.

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I

THE PRESENT PATHETIC ATTITUDE TOWARD PRAYER

I

IT is interesting to know what people are thinking. This I imagine is the reason why we read the "Voice of the People" column in the morning paper. It is hardly conceivable that one would dip into that unappetizing dish every day in the year for the chance of finding a choice morsel, though it cannot be denied that several particularly choice morsels have been found in it; but experience has taught us that if one has the perseverance to read it regularly and thoroughly, omitting nothing—not even its innocuous controversies, with their bald eccentricities and futile explosions of temper—one may come at last to a familiarity with the popular mind such as is rarely acquired from any other form of exercise. Indeed I know of nothing comparable to it unless it is that rarest privilege of the enthusiastic student of the human species—the privilege of lunching in a quiet corner of a café with a talkative stranger —a different but always talkative stranger—every day in the year.

Several months ago the leading morning paper in our town, at the solicitation of an anxious reader, opened its columns to a free-for-all discussion of the question whether God really answers prayer or not. Instantly a score or more of zealous champions sprang into the arena, and before the end of the week the town found itself warming up under an old-fashioned religious controversy, such as our fathers were accustomed to amuse themselves with before the more strenuous but less joyful days of baseball. It was a promising fight and hopes of victory ran high on both sides; but it went on and on until it wore itself out, and when it ended it was just where it was when it began. Nobody had won, nobody had lost, nobody had even made a hit.

One of the puzzling questions of this life is the readiness with which intelligent people allow themselves to be drawn into a contest where they must fight with weapons which, in the nature of things, cannot possibly make contact with the things they are going against. That is the situation whenever Christians and unbelievers come together to argue a matter that has to do with the life of the spirit. The unbeliever—usually a materialist—comes to attack a thing of the spirit with material weapons, while the Christian comes to ward off his material blows with a spiritual affirmation. I cannot imagine what it is that leads us into such folly unless it is a survival of the impulse which led our pagan

ancestors to arm themselves with sticks and stones before passing a graveyard at night. Our controversy over prayer was interesting in many ways, but as a fight it was foolish. It could not have been more foolish if one side had advanced against prayer with a darning needle and the other side had undertaken to parry the blow with an article of faith. That indeed was about what was done. Neither side seemed to remember that all the methods of proving things which we poor humans have invented were designed for the sphere of matter; and that one can no more use them to prove a thing in the sphere of spirit than one can use a hat-pin to prove the presence of a thought in a human brain.

If a burglar should attempt to shoot me, and I should cry to God for help, and a thunderbolt from a clear sky should strike him dead on the spot, that would not prove that God answers prayer. I might call it a proof, but the materialist would call it a coincidence, and I could no more prove that it was not a coincidence than he could prove that it was. No number of material facts can absolutely prove anything in which an immeasurable quantity is involved, and in the matter of prayer the immeasurable realm of spirit is involved.

But does not this leave the whole matter of prayer in doubt? No; no more than it leaves anything else that is of the spirit in doubt. Love is a thing of the spirit, and if I should try a thousand

years to prove that my mother loves me I could not do it. But that would not leave the matter in doubt: I would know that my mother loves me all the same.

II

But while our controversy as such was a failure, as a revelation of the mind of the community on the points at issue it was a notable success. It told us in unmistakable terms what people—all sorts of people—are thinking when they are thinking about prayer. And it told us some things which many of us were not prepared to learn.

Some of these were amazing. For example, the discussion was no sooner under way than it became evident that most of the disputants were labouring under a misapprehension as to the meaning of prayer. Many of them seemed to have prayer defined in their minds largely in terms of paganism. While their phraseology was Christian their ideas did not essentially differ from those of civilized pagans of two thousand years ago. This was as true of the scholarly materialist, who aired his views with the confidence of authority, as it was of the most ignorant believer, whose words sometimes trembled in spite of his faith. Neither seemed to think that it was important to inquire whether the ideas they were contending over were Christian or pagan. They were no more concerned on that point than they would have been if they

had agreed among themselves that prayer is prayer and must stand or fall on its merits regardless of whether it is defined by a Christian or a pagan. And in nearly every case the idea that was fought over was either pagan or semi-pagan! Believers fought for more than one idea that was purely pagan, and whenever a materialist turned loose his shafts of sarcasm upon what he supposed to be a teaching of Christ, it almost invariably proved to be an idea which Christ Himself had opposed!

III

Another significant fact which came out in the course of the controversy was that the pagan ideas which were fought over owe much of their strength and persistence to the support which they have received from popular misinterpretations of Christ's teachings. This I shall discuss farther on, but I mention it here because it leads to a still more serious fact, and one with which we are immediately concerned. This fact (which was also suggested by the controversy) is that it is the support which our popular misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus have given to our inherited pagan ideas that is largely responsible for the present pathetic attitude of the average Christian toward prayer.

I presume no one will question that this attitude is pathetic. Really it is something to cry over. If there is anything more unsatisfactory or more dis-

tressing in religious experience than the average Christian's experience as a praying man I cannot imagine what it is. On almost every question that one asks about prayer to-day the average believer is in a hopeless fog. He has never tried to build up a creed on the subject and he hardly knows what he believes or what he ought to believe. He says he believes in prayer—of course he believes in prayer,—but if you question him as to the foundations of his belief he will probably say that he has none to speak of; he believes in it mainly because he feels that he ought to believe in it. If you go further and ask for his experience as a praying man he will hesitate and cough; it is an unpleasant subject and he would rather not go into it. Or, if you press him, he will probably say that there is nothing to say except that he must confess he has never found anything in it. He dislikes to admit it, but if he must judge from his own experience, he cannot see how anything can result from it. Really it does not seem worth while. And then he will grow confidential and tell you in a pitiful way about his first-born son, and about how earnestly he prayed for him when he was ill, and how the boy seemed to grow better and better and then one day suddenly became worse and died. And he will tell you how sorely that terrible experience tried his faith. He will not say that it destroyed his faith, but he will admit that ever since that day he has hardly known

just what to believe. And then he will go back to that terrible experience and tell you about his desperate efforts to persuade God to save his boy; how he tried to bargain with Him; how he told Him that if He would not let his boy die he would be a better man and have family prayers and be more liberal to the church and try to make his wife and children happy, and all that, and how it was all to no purpose. "I still believe in prayer," he will add, "at least I suppose I do, but I just haven't had any success in that line. Perhaps it's because I've never quite got the hang of it."

II

WHERE FAITH BEGINS TO BREAK DOWN

I

I HAVE said that the present attitude of the average Christian toward prayer is something to cry over. But it is more than that: it is something to think over; and that is what we want to do just now.

Let us begin with a tragedy—the greatest tragedy of modern times. I do not mean the World War: I mean the almost world-wide spiritual collapse which preceded it. I know it is still difficult to believe that there ever was a greater tragedy than the World War, but the time will come when we shall see that the awful horror which overwhelmed the fair fields of Flanders and France, appalling as it was, is not to be compared with the terrible calamity which a little while before had fallen upon the land of the spirit in almost every part of Christendom. The monster military machine which Germany sent forth to mow down the nations was undoubtedly the last word in human frightfulness, but it was not the last word in human destructiveness. That word was spoken when the German universities a generation before the war sent out their terrible rationalistic Juggernaut

to destroy the armies of the spirit, the only forces that seriously stood in the way of the Prussian militaristic ambition. That monster, be it remembered, was never turned back. It was never even halted. It went on its deadly way as ruthlessly and as inevitably as fate, and when the World War came it had not only nearly completed the intellectual and spiritual conquest of Europe, but it had successfully bombarded many of the greatest intellectual and spiritual fortresses of America.

After all, a nation is only a group of individuals, and the real value of history lies not in what it tells us concerning such artificial divisions of the race as national governments, but in the light which it sheds upon humanity and especially upon these particular units of humanity which we call ourselves; and it is high time we were applying the lessons of the war to our own souls. We need to realize that when we say, as the war has taught us to say, that the greatest tragedy that can befall a nation is the destruction of its religious foundations, we really mean the religious foundations of a people; and we need to remember that this lesson is intended not for the artificial organization which we call our government (a thing we seem to value nowadays mainly as a convenient scapegoat for our sins as a people), but for our people as a people, and for the particular individuals who compose this particular people. For one thing we need to realize that the terrible spiritual cataclysm

which overtook the nations of continental Europe before the war, as a result of their long exposure to rationalistic and materialistic teaching, does not materially differ from the cataclysm which is today overtaking multitudes of our own people here in America who have been exposed to like deadly influences.

II

One of the commonest and most pathetic sights one passes on the roadside of life nowadays is a wreck of religious faith. Even more common and perhaps more pathetic are the miserable half-wrecks which one meets along the road itself. One can hardly sit down to rest that some poor trembling creature does not stop and thrust his nose in your face and in a hoarse whisper demand to know what's the matter with Christianity and what we are all coming to anyway. Or perhaps it is a sad-faced young man who has recently lost his mother and who wants to know if science has really left anything of Christianity that an intelligent man can tie to. Or a sad-faced old man who in a quavering voice asks whether you think there is any chance for the old ship. Or a desolate-looking woman in black just returning from a séance, who is anxious for your opinion as to whether one may hope to find in spiritualism what one has failed to find in religion. Or perhaps it is a middle-aged man of heroic build whom you used to see stand-

ing like a bronze statue with both feet firmly planted upon the Rock of Ages, and whom you saw yesterday standing, not upon it but before it, and trying to summon up the courage to venture the weight of one foot upon it. You remember how he would reach out one trembling foot and draw it back and then the other and draw that back. Or perhaps it is your neighbour's son just from college.

That is the worst of all. How often you have wished from the bottom of your heart that you could go to sleep and forget that boy!

If there is anything in our modern life more depressing than this appalling drift of young men and women away from religion I cannot imagine what it is. A generation ago if a hundred boys went from our town to college it was a safe guess that at least ninety would come back with the fundamentals of their religious faith unimpaired. To-day when a hundred of our boys go to college, unless the college is aggressively Christian, we do not expect to see half of them return with their religious faith unimpaired. Not a few will come back without any faith at all. The case of the college girl is not so serious, but it is growing more and more serious every day. A generation ago, if a hundred girls went off to school a hundred would come back with their faith intact; to-day most of our college girls come home with a religious faith of some sort, but in not a few cases

it is in such sad need of repair that they are ashamed to let their mothers see it. It is only to the distinctly Christian college—the college whose atmosphere is thoroughly permeated with the teachings and spirit of Christ—that we can to-day send our sons or daughters with any assurance that they will come back with the foundations of their faith undisturbed.

III

It is human to take things for granted. It is especially human to assume things about a matter which we cannot investigate without serious discomfort to ourselves. And we have been very human in our attitude toward our present religious situation. Some of us have been saying that this appalling drift of our young people away from religion is due to the fact that the Christian creed is out of date. Others of us have argued that Christianity has ceased to appeal to the race because the needs of the modern man are different from the needs of the man of the past. Still others of us like to think that the trouble is to be found at college. What is easier than to prove that it is practically impossible for a religious faith to live in the materialistic atmosphere which is to be found wherever science has been given the exclusive right of way? And then there are many outside of the Christian group—unbelievers of a scientific turn, men who would not be supposed to take anything

for granted—who tell us that the secret is to be found in the fact that our boys and girls discover when they go to college that Christianity will not bear inspection in the light of science.

It is all the easier to assume these things when one has fallen into our modern habit of studiously avoiding disagreeable facts. A shipwreck of faith is a disagreeable fact and when we come in sight of such a wreck there are few of us who can resist the temptation to pass by on the other side. Only once in a while does one come upon a man who has the courage to ask a college boy who has lost his faith to go off with him to some quiet spot and sit down and tell him how it happened. That sort of thing is not to the modern taste.

Yet when one does succeed in commanding one's will to so unpleasant a task one learns some things that are well worth all that they have cost. For one thing he learns that college boys don't give up Christianity because the creed is out of date. College boys are not interested in creeds. They may tell you that the Christian creed is out of date, but most of them have never so much as looked at the date to see how old it is. Boys don't think of creeds—not even when they speak of them.

Again, one learns that boys don't give up their religious faith because they have reached the conclusion that organized Christianity does not meet the needs of the modern man. Unbelievers at college rarely attempt to unsettle a boy's faith by re-

minding him of the deficiencies of organized Christianity. They may talk about these things, but they don't expect to unsettle a boy's faith by talking about them.

You cannot break down a boy's faith by arguing with him about the creed or the Church. The fact is you cannot break down his faith by arguing with him on any subject. A college boy dearly loves to argue and if you face him with nothing but arguments he will stand by his religion to the last. Arguments alone, instead of weakening him in his position, only set him to work to intrench himself more strongly in his position.

If one will take the trouble to go carefully over an actual case of shipwreck of faith one will find that the boy's ship did not go to pieces on any of the rocks which are supposed to loom up so fatally at college. The arguments of history and the discoveries of science which a boy runs against in his college course may make his ship easier to wreck later on, but if he does not run against anything else his ship is likely to return to the home harbour at the end of his four years in a fairly seaworthy condition.

The trouble comes when something else happens. The discovery that certain items in the faith his mother taught him are contrary to the facts of science or of life, disconcerting as it may be, may not alone cause any serious damage; but if he goes further—if he is led to compare these items with

the facts of his *own* life—with his own religious experience—and should discover that his own experience gives them the lie, he will suffer a shock that may send his ship to the bottom. I do not mean to say that all wrecks of faith at college occur in this way, but it is the usual way. The faith of one's childhood is usually strong enough to survive many a hard storm and many a frightful crash among the rocks, but when a boy stands face to face with the cold facts of his own religious experience and suddenly discovers that they give the lie to that faith, the shock is more than the average faith can stand.

IV

The religious experience of the average boy, like that of the average man, is his experience with prayer. The religious experience of a highly developed Christian covers a wide field, but when the average man sits down to think of his own experience as a Christian, he thinks of his failures in prayer—of how often in the most critical moments of life—moments "when a fellow needs a friend"—he had gone to God in prayer, and of how in spite of his faith and earnestness God had paid no attention to his cries. And when a boy who has made a failure of prayer and who has come into the cold light of science at college begins to think of his experience as a praying Christian, trouble is almost sure to come. For—to change

my figure—faith in a prayer-answering God is the bottom foundation stone of the average man's religion, and when his belief in prayer crumbles everything goes with it. Or, if I may use still another figure, prayer is the weakest link in the chain of faith and the chain will hold only so long as the prayer link holds. If John goes to college with a satisfactory experience with prayer, he is likely to come back with his chain of faith intact. If the prayer link holds the rest will hold. He will have his troubles, no doubt, and he will probably have to give up some ideas which his mother taught him for Christian truths, but so long as his faith concerning prayer holds, his chain of faith, no matter how severely it may be strained, will never break. He may not be able to answer every scoffing Sophomore who gives that chain a vicious pull, but he will have an answer for every doubt that may rise in his own soul. He will say to his soul, "I know that I have come in touch with God in prayer, and that settles it."

No stone that the enemy may hurl against John's chain of faith can break it if he is conscious of a satisfactory experience on that one point. But on the other hand a very small stone will break it if the prayer link is weak. If John goes to college with an unsatisfactory experience as a praying Christian the enemy will only have to confuse him with a dazzling show of science and then drive him back upon that experience. The mo-

ment he is forced to ask himself what he can point to in his religious experience that confirms the truth of Christianity, he will think of his experience with prayer. He will recall how his mother taught him that if he wanted anything and would ask for it in Jesus' name he would get it, and how he had asked and asked and asked and nothing had ever come of it.

And then he will throw up his hands.

Does this mean that if John's faith breaks down at college it will be because of his discovery that Christ's teaching about prayer does not accord with the facts of life? No. Nobody has ever made such a discovery and it is safe to say that nobody ever will. John may discover that what he was taught for the teachings of Christ about prayer does not accord with the facts of life, but that is another matter. Even that discovery, as I have said, is not likely to cause his faith to break down. A boy's faith will hold up against anything that you may direct against it so long as your attack is not personal. If John's faith breaks down it will be when he discovers that what he has been taught for Christ's teaching about prayer does not accord with the facts of life as shown *in his own experience.*

V

This it seems to me is the main secret of our present distressing religious situation. Unques-

tionably it is the secret of a large part of the present frightful drift of our young people away from religion. Most of our boys and girls who turn their backs upon religion do so under a misapprehension. They think they have ceased to believe in Christianity; as a matter of fact they have only ceased to believe in some things which their good mothers, with the best intentions in the world, have taught them for Christianity. As I have said elsewhere,[1] when the average Christian mother takes up the task of instructing her children in religion, she does not undertake to find out what Jesus actually taught; she only recalls what she was taught in her own childhood, and teaches that. That was what her mother did before her and her mother's mother, and so on back to her pagan ancestors. This means of course that the average mother teaches not only what she has inherited from her Christian ancestors, but also what she has inherited from her pagan ancestors who preceded them. And this means that the religious faith which she builds up in the minds of her children is likely to be a hopeless tangle of Christian and pagan ideas, the general effect of which is more pagan than Christian.

It is this fact, together with the fact that the religion of the average man rests upon his faith in a prayer-answering God, that makes the present

[1] "Bringing Up John," Fleming H. Revell Company, N. Y.

popular attitude toward prayer one of the most pressing religious problems of our time. If we are going to save the religious faith of the race we have got to save its faith in a prayer-answering God, and if we are going to save its faith in a prayer-answering God we have got to provide a better foundation for that faith to rest upon in the popular mind than the present popular conception of prayer. And if we are going to do this there is no time to lose, for the present foundation is doomed. Unquestionably it is doomed. The fierce light of modern intelligence is beating pitilessly upon it and already it is utterly discredited in every intelligent mind that has taken the trouble to examine it. Moreover this vague suspicion concerning prayer which has always lurked in the minds of the multitude—this feeling that there is something wrong about the claims that have been made for it and that perhaps our religious teachers have not been altogether frank with us—a feeling which the average Christian of the past hardly dared to admit to himself, much less to his neighbour—this vague suspicion has been steadily growing in recent years, and it is now so strong that many good people no longer hesitate to admit it either to themselves or to their neighbours; and this has added enormously to the present peril.

We are in the presence of a situation which we can no longer evade and we might as well face it. And we might as well begin by frankly admitting

that we have not been altogether frank about this matter. The Church has not been faithful to the faith. It has known for ages that some of its most precious doctrines were resting in the popular mind upon foundations which would not bear inspection, and to this day it has made no serious effort to improve the situation. To this day it has stood silently by while its people have been building for themselves foundations for their faith that will not bear inspection in any sort of light. And often it has unconsciously aided and abetted them in their task. Only the other day I heard a minister speak of prayer in terms that were largely pagan. He knew better, of course; it was only a habit; but he did it. The fact is, in this matter of prayer the attitude of the pulpit for centuries has been that of the mother who is content for her child to learn half-truths while he is young because she has solemnly promised herself to teach him the whole truth when he is older.

Serious as it is there is nothing discouraging about the present situation except our lack of courage to face it. If we only had the courage to face it we would find that there was nothing to be afraid of and that would be half the battle. Prayer is not what it has been usually represented to be, but we shall not be afraid to say so when we are able to add that it is something better. Nor will we be afraid to admit that the foundation upon which prayer rests in the popular mind is

crumbling, when we can point to a far older foundation that has never shown a sign of crumbling. And why should we hesitate to turn the declining faith of men from a foundation which, in spite of the goodly Christian stones that are in it, threatens to collapse from the crumbling of the worthless pagan ideas that run through it, when we have at hand a foundation which was built by the Master Teacher Himself, the only foundation of prayer that has continued through the ages unshaken by the facts of human experience or the progress of human knowledge?

III

OUR PAGAN IDEAS OF PRAYER

I

WE are often told—usually by some smilingly reassuring smatterer in psychology—that children do not have doubts until they are well in their teens; but I am sure I began to have my serious suspicions about prayer long before I was twelve. The truth is, psychology does not teach that children do not have doubts until they are well in their teens: it only teaches that the tendency to doubt does not appear until then. A sixteen-year-old boy has a tendency to doubt; he enjoys doubting; he would much rather doubt than believe. A little child hates to doubt: it gives him bad " feels " inside. But he has them, now and then, all the same.

And I had mine. I was not proud of them—no normal child is proud of his doubts,—and I never dared to mention them; but I had them. I did not doubt God's ability or willingness to answer prayer, but I had very serious doubts about some of the rules that had been given me to pray by. I had tried them and they did not work. And when a thing doesn't work even a little child must doubt. I don't mean that I ceased to believe: a child's faith

does not cease; it only suffers lapses. The little girl who defiantly announced that she did not believe in God any more because she had prayed and prayed and prayed for a doll and had said "for Jesus' sake" and hadn't gotten it, did not really become an atheist, but for a long time whenever she thought of that doll her faith suffered at least a momentary interruption. And my own similar experience with prayer gave my faith many interruptions.

Frequent lapses of faith in childhood do not insure a future of unbelief, but they do promise a future of fear, and for many years I was afraid to face the truth about prayer. I kept on praying and forcing myself to say that I believed, but I did not dare to spread out my doctrine of prayer in broad daylight before other people's eyes or even my own. It was as if I had staked everything on the genuineness of a beautiful necklace of pearls and was afraid to have it examined.

I have mentioned my own case not because I think it is unusual but because I am sure it is not. Thus far at least most of my readers will recognize my story as their own. Indeed I seriously doubt whether there is a thoughtful Christian of the present day who can look back over his life without recalling a time when there came into his mind a suspicion about prayer that so terrified him that he was never able to think of it afterwards without shuddering. But happily this is not the whole

story. Now and then one is driven—sometimes by a sense of obligation to the truth, sometimes by sheer desperation—to sit down and look the facts squarely in the face; and then the story takes a wonderful turn. I shall never forget the sense of relief that came over me when, after many years of cowardly evasion, I succeeded in getting command of my will and spread out before my vision in broad daylight all the questions which my doubting heart had been asking about prayer. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was plain that the ideas of prayer which I had been afraid to examine were false; but not one of them came from Jesus! They were all either misinterpretations of the Master's teachings or survivals of paganism. And side by side with these false ideas, which I had always taken for granted were the teachings of Jesus, lay the actual teachings of Jesus, which I had strangely overlooked, not one of which, even in the fierce light to which I had exposed them, showed a single flaw.

All through the years I had been a slave to fear for nothing.

II

There is nothing to fear from an honest examination of one's religious beliefs, but one might as well be prepared for some rude shocks, especially if one undertakes to separate the beliefs which he has received from Christ from those which he has received from pagan or semi-pagan sources. Per-

haps two-thirds of our popular conceptions of death and the hereafter are pagan or semi-pagan. Certainly two-thirds of all that is written about death is more pagan than Christian. Some of the most beautiful tributes to the dead that one reads in the morning paper are wholly pagan. Only yesterday I read a charming editorial on the death of a prominent citizen which might well have been written in the time of Plato. The prominent citizen, who in his lifetime dearly loved to browse among old books, had crossed the Styx and gone to a ghostly land where, it was hoped, he might continue his browsings in the company of congenial shades—and so forth. Of course the editor did not mean it, for he is both a Christian and a scholar; but the pagan habit of the ages held his pen, and it isn't pleasant to try to break away from a habit and write an editorial at the same time.

The atmosphere in the average Christian home in time of death is heavy with paganism. If the Master should come in with His cheerful face and the happy assurance that the little maid is "not dead but sleepeth," all the mourners would laugh Him to scorn. The minister who comes to comfort the bereaved must spend most of his time in desperate efforts to rescue them from the heavy pall of pagan ideas that is suffocating them. Even the pious mother has forgotten the apostle's admonition to "weep not as those who have no hope," and is talking pitifully between her paroxysms of

grief of her bud of promise blighted, of the chilly flood through which her darling passed, and of how terrible it is to think of her precious babe flitting about among the shadows like a formless ghost. And there is the father (a very practical sort of Christian in his store down-town, but a most unpractical pagan at home in a time of sorrow), talking mournfully of the tragic end of little John, and the dear old grandmother repeating softly to herself in the spirit of her pagan ancestors of two thousand years ago—

"When death's cold, sullen stream across us rolls."

Many of our ideas of God are wholly pagan. All those horrible pictures of the Deity which nurses use to frighten little children into being good came from pagan sources. Even the horrible pictures of God which we attribute to the Old Testament owe much of their frightfulness to the colouring which they have received from the inherited paganism that still affects our vision. Even that time-honoured teaching, so highly esteemed by mothers of a certain practical type—the teaching that God is "mad" with little children when they are bad, harks back to the distant heathen days when the gods were accustomed to lose their temper and hurl thunderbolts at one another.

III

As for our popular modern ideas of prayer, nearly all that are not purely pagan are more or

less coloured or distorted by paganism. Take first of all our mercenary ideas. The question, "Does it pay to pray?" as usually asked, may be traced back to the dim dawn of history when man in the dimness mistook the altar for a bargain counter. The modern Christian who never thinks of prayer except with an eye to gain, does his religious thinking along the same lines as his pagan ancestors in the days when men brought an offering of small value to the altar as a gamble on the chance of getting something of great value in return. No doubt the question whether it pays to pray was often asked in those days, and no doubt some pious pagan would rise to tell how he had one day carried a lamb to the altar—a poor little thing which he didn't expect would live—and how the gods were so pleased that they rescued his whole flock from a pestilence.

We speak of commercialism nowadays as if it were a new thing under the sun; but the commercial age must have begun away back before the dawn of history, soon after the heathen began to experiment with prayer. At first, apparently, they were not encouraged by the hope of gain: all that one tried to do was to save himself from the wrath of the gods. Later somebody who had succeeded, as he believed, in propitiating the gods by gifts, developed the idea that if he could induce the gods not to hurt him he might go further and induce them to help him. And so he undertook not only

to quiet their wrath but to ingratiate himself into their favour. This naturally encouraged his greed and he soon began to develop shrewd plans for getting the best of the bargain. Sometimes he attempted to cheat the gods outright and get something for nothing. Sometimes he would be liberal with his gifts with the hope that they would be still more liberal in return. By and by he developed the idea of what we would call a bargain counter, and undertook to see how much he could get for the smallest outlay.

All of our so-called modern commercial ideas of prayer are at least several thousand years old, and all of them came from pagan sources. The man who says his prayers at night because he is afraid to go to bed without saying them is dominated by a pagan idea that must have been hoary with age at the dawn of civilization. The man who dedicates his new home to God, not out of love for God, but because he hopes that it will keep his house from burning down, is to that extent a pagan. So is the man who prays every day at his store because an old neighbour of his prayed every day at his store and made more money than he knew what to do with.

IV

Let us bring the matter closer home. A man who has never had anything to do with God, though he has been a member of the church for

twenty years, wakes up one dark morning to find himself in desperate straits. Let us say that his oldest son, his heart's idol, is hopelessly ill and that the doctors have said that the end may be expected any moment. In his extremity he thinks of God. He really knows nothing about God at first hand, but he knows some good people who have tried prayer and who have found that it paid. He recalls a particularly encouraging instance that happened in his own neighbourhood. A good man went to God about his son who was ill. It didn't seem to make any difference at first, but he kept going at certain hours so many times a day, and at last the boy took a sudden turn for the better and got well. And so he resolves to try it. He resolves to try it on his boy just as some people have tried carrying a dried potato in their pockets for rheumatism. He doesn't really see how it can do any good, but he decides that as it won't do any harm and won't cost anything, there is no reason why he shouldn't make the experiment. And so he begins to pray. Rather he begins to say prayers. He does not know God and really does not care to know Him, but just now he is ready for anything. He is like the man who has never had anything to do with Christian Science healers and would not think of noticing them now, only he is in such desperate straits that he is bound to do something.

He begins with the idea that the "trick" consists in approaching God in a certain way and say-

ing certain things and closing with the simple formula, "For Jesus' sake," or "In Jesus' name;" and he begins to pray accordingly. His son does not get any better and he concludes that it is probably because he has not prayed long enough or often enough or earnestly enough, and so he begins to pray longer and oftener and more earnestly. And soon his son begins to improve. Now he feels that he has learned the trick, and he prays still longer and still oftener and still more earnestly, until one day the boy suddenly grows worse. This brings him to his wit's end and for hours he hovers trembling upon the verge of despair. Then another thought comes to him. Perhaps he has made a mistake in trying to get something for nothing. Perhaps his prayers would have had more weight with God if he had put some attractive offers into them. And so he decides to try again. He will see if he can make a bargain with God. He will tell God that if He will make his boy well he will do thus and so. He will be a better man; a better father; a better husband; a better neighbour. He will go to church oftener. He will contribute more to missions and to charity. He will do almost anything that God would have him do.

It is a familiar story and I need not pursue it further. One can find it repeated to the end in every community in Christendom. The only strange thing about it is that it should be found in

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Christendom. That is why I have mentioned it: one would think that it could happen only in heathendom. For it is as plain as the sun that it is a purely pagan experience throughout. From beginning to end there is not a single Christian idea or even a single reminder of anything that the Master has taught, except the formula "In Jesus' name," and that is used only as a pagan would have used it. Such an experience is not only non-Christian, but it is un-Christian. It is utterly repugnant to the teaching of Christ. The man who goes to God with an eye to gain, just as he would go to a rich and powerful stranger, does not pray: with such a motive he cannot pray. He can beg, or he can try to drive a bargain, but he cannot pray.

V

It is a significant fact that mercenary ideas of prayer are always found in unmistakably pagan company. No matter how orthodox their surroundings may appear they are invariably associated with magical ideas of prayer, all of which are plainly pagan. The idea that there is some mysterious power in prayer itself seems to be almost as widespread as the human race. One meets with it in Christian America almost as often as in pagan India. Everywhere people speak of prayer as they would speak of a magic wand. Undoubtedly this idea owes something of its persistence to the ex-

cessive indulgence of the pulpit in unexplained figures of speech. In the days of the fathers, when everybody was familiar with Biblical metaphors, the figurative language of the pulpit was usually illuminating, but to-day it often happens that when the preacher thinks he is shedding light he is only casting a shadow. The other day I heard a sermon of wonderful beauty. It was as richly adorned with figures as a piece of costly tapestry, and as a work of art it was faultless; but when at the close of the service a distinguished lawyer was asked how he liked it, he replied: "Don't ask me: I haven't the slightest idea of what he was talking about."

Unquestionably the preachers' habit of speaking of prayer in highly coloured figures of speech has done much toward mystifying the popular mind on the subject and encouraging the idea that it is a mysterious something that will work amazing tricks if one only knows how to use it. How often we were told in our childhood that prayer is a bell-rope let down from heaven to God's children and that if we only had the faith to take hold of it and pull hard enough we would ring a bell in heaven that would inevitably bring God down to our help! Then there was that amazing story about Jacob and the angel. How the dear old preachers loved to linger over that wonderful wrestling match, and how earnestly they would assure their hearers that if they would only wrestle

with God in prayer with Jacob's faith and persistence they would prevail over Him and win the fight! How often we were assured that by prayer we could take hold of the throne of God and shake it! Prayer could do anything. Prayer was a magic wand which, if we would wave toward heaven with faith, would cause the windows of blessing to open and all the good things of God would come tumbling down upon us. Prayer was a lever which, if placed upon the fulcrum of faith, could move heaven and earth. Most of these old figures have long since passed away, but the figurative habit is still with us. To-day we are told that prayer is a dynamo—a dynamo of such power that if we only had a belt of faith strong enough it could run the machinery of the whole universe. Prayer is a reservoir of power which, if tapped by the faith of God's people, would release enough force to carry the Kingdom of God into the farthest corners of the earth. A prayer is a stick of dynamite, and if God's people would only put their sticks together and set them all off at one time they could blow up this sinful old world and make it over as God wants it to be! And so on. Only a few weeks ago the manager of a nation-wide church campaign proclaimed in flaming advertisements all over the land that prayer is the Church's only source of power and America's only hope.

But the blame for the persistence of magical ideas of prayer does not rest wholly or mainly

upon our highly figurative pulpit. Unquestionably many people have taken the pulpit's metaphors more or less literally, but they would never have been seriously misled by them if they had not shared this uncanny feeling about prayer which seems to be almost as widespread as the race. And this feeling is undoubtedly an inheritance from our pagan ancestors. Our modern prayer chains, our elaborate schemes to keep a stream of prayer ascending to heaven without a break so that the cry of human need shall never cease in the ear of God, the schedules of prayer campaigns designed to secure the united prayers of God's people on particular days for particular causes, so that heaven would be bombarded one day with petitions for missions, and the next day with petitions for our schools or our orphanages, and the third day with petitions for stricken Europe—all these things, however pious they may be, so far as they are prompted by magical ideas of prayer, have their origin in paganism. Christians may properly have a part in them if they go into them with Christian ideas of prayer, but not if they go under the influence of magical ideas, all of which, as I have said, are purely pagan.

VI

What I have said of our magical ideas of prayer is just as true of our mechanical ideas of prayer, most of which have grown out of them. The idea that the mere saying of certain prayers regardless

of the state of one's mind or heart has virtue in it is, of course, a pagan inheritance. This idea prevails among all sorts of Christians—Protestant and Catholic,—but neither Protestants nor Catholics teach it: it is a survival of paganism. The girl who says her prayers while her mind is wandering through a romantic adventure may be praying as a pagan but not as a Christian. The man who says his prayers on Sunday while planning an ungodly deed for Monday is no more engaged in Christian prayer than the heathen who prays to the gods to give him success in robbing his neighbour.

The idea that persistent praying brings God under obligation to us is also pagan. The pious mother who consoles herself with the thought that God is bound to answer her prayers for her wayward son simply because she has prayed so many years for him, is no doubt a good Christian, but on that particular point she is only voicing the faith of her pious heathen ancestors.

Finally—or rather to make an end, for there are still others—the idea that prayer was designed to enable us to prevail upon God to conform to our wishes is purely pagan. As a matter of fact this is the fundamental idea of all pagan prayers. Away back in the dim dawn of history we find men going to God with the hope of getting Him to drop His wishes for theirs. They conceived of God as a being like themselves, engrossed in His own selfish plans and pursuits, some of which often cut ruth-

lessly across their own plans and pursuits, and they hoped by some means or other to get Him to drop whatever He was doing that interfered with them. And so they came with gifts in their hands. They tried to get Him in a good humour. They tried to buy Him off. They tried to drive bargains with Him. They even tried to cheat Him. Later they conceived the idea that He was merciful and they tried to excite His pity. Everything they did was with the hope of getting Him into a frame of mind to consent to drop His wishes and plans for theirs. They wanted Him to suspend His own selfish business in the skies and come down and interest Himself in their affairs. They realized, perhaps as clearly as we do to-day, that God and men were not on good terms, and that this was the cause of all their woes; and they went to God to "make up" with Him. And in their blindness they thought only of the pleasanter way. They would persuade God to come to their side. If He would drop His wishes and plans for theirs then they would be on the best of terms and everything would be harmonious and lovely. God would no more play with thunderbolts where there was danger of striking their loved ones dead, and there would be no more terrible storms to sweep away their harvests at reaping time.

It never occurred to them that there was any other way. It never occurred to them that God might require them to come to His side and har-

monize with Him. They only thought of getting Him to harmonize with them.

It is needless to inquire how this amazing idea became so deeply rooted in the human mind. It is important only to know that it is there, that it persists in spite of the significant fact that it has never been known to work, and in spite of the equally significant fact that for ages it has had to contend with Christ's own fundamental idea of prayer, which has never failed to work and which is diametrically opposed to it. For nearly two thousand years the Christian pulpit has been proclaiming in season and out of season that the only way a man can come into harmony with God, the Supreme Source of Supply, is to drop his own will and go and fall in with God's will, and yet there are still vast multitudes of Christians in the world who are clinging to the hope of getting their wants supplied by inducing God to drop His will and come down and fall in with theirs.

IV

OUR MISINTERPRETATIONS OF THE MASTER

I

I HAVE said that the ideas of prayer which we have inherited from our pagan ancestors owe much of their strength and persistence to our popular misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus. The most depressing, if not the most humiliating fact in the history of Christianity is that after nearly two thousand years of unceasing effort to explain the teachings of Jesus, He is still the most widely misinterpreted teacher the world has ever known. If we should undertake to-day to erect a truthful monument to His memory we could think of no name that could be so appropriately carved upon it as *The Misunderstood Master*. The world understands Buddha fairly well, and Confucius and Plato and the rest; but it does not understand Jesus. Rather it misunderstands Him. It seems to have a fatal bent toward misunderstanding Him. One would think from the way it approaches Him that it really prefers to misunderstand Him. Nobody is unfair to Buddha or Plato,

but even the best friends of Jesus are unfair to Jesus. Nobody is so foolish as to subject the teachings of Buddha to a set of cast-iron rules of interpretation made in America and based upon one's knowledge of America and the American mind, life and character of to-day; but most people insist upon treating the teachings of Jesus that way. Most people—even most Christians—insist upon making the words of Jesus mean what they would mean if they were spoken by an American to Americans of to-day, instead of by an Oriental to a particular type of Orientals of two thousand years ago.

And this is not all. We not only apply to the teachings of Christ rules which are not applicable to them, but we insist upon approaching them with methods of study which we would not think of using in any other serious study whatever.

No wonder we have missed the way. No wonder we have wandered so far from the footsteps of Jesus that we sometimes wonder whether we have a right to call ourselves Christians. No wonder we are to-day translating the words of Jesus out of the vernacular of the kingdom of heaven into the selfish language of a materialistic world. No wonder we are putting so much business into our religion that it is becoming more of a business than a religion. No wonder we have organized and developed the Church into a vast, complicated, noisy machine that is no more like the Church of the

days of the apostles than a modern steel plant, with its frightful furnaces and horrible din, is like a quiet fire in the living-room in the evening twilight with four feet on the fender.

II

At the close of the World War a prominent Australian made a speech at a banquet in England, in the course of which he amazed and humiliated his hearers by casting what seemed to be a gratuitous and unspeakably gross insult upon America. It was so plainly worded that it was impossible for even the most charitably inclined to twist the insult out of it, and his friends were compelled to resort to the ancient apology that he had taken "a leetle drop too much." But the next day when the man learned through the newspapers how his words had been taken he was as greatly amazed and humiliated as his friends. He had never thought of insulting America. He had no desire to insult America. He was incapable of insulting America. As a matter of fact, he was not even thinking of America. He had been greatly wrought up over an unjust criticism of the British Government and as a loyal Britisher he was doing his best to answer it. That was all there was of it.

I mention this incident not only because it shows how easy it is to misunderstand others under the most favourable conditions, but to call attention to the fact that the more literal and matter of fact a

people are the more likely they are to misunderstand others. It is not the imaginative Oriental, who does his thinking in highly coloured metaphors, who has the greatest difficulty in understanding a public speaker, but the unimaginative Westerner who calls a spade a spade, and who has no appreciation of the subtle niceties of the mind that would prefer to think of it as an unnamed agricultural implement of uncertain origin.

It is as easy to misunderstand as it is to assume that we do understand, and whatever may be said of the Westerner's fondness for hard work, it must be admitted that when it comes to thinking he prefers the easier task. We misunderstand largely because we so easily assume that we do understand. Taking a man's words to mean what they say on the surface is so much easier than to admit that we are not prepared to say what he means until we have gone beneath the surface. It is no small job to dig down beneath the surface—to find out where the words came from; in what age and country they were spoken; the race and civilization and habits of speech of the man who spoke them; the character of his language—whether literal or figurative; his modes of thought; his knowledge; his life and character; his ideals and aspirations. In other words it is so much easier to be unfair than fair.

This undoubtedly is one reason why we have so persistently misinterpreted Jesus.

The world has never had a teacher whom it has treated as unfairly as it has treated the Master.

If a neighbour should come to me and repeat a seemingly unkind remark which a friend of mine had made about me, I would not take the remark at its face value. I would not at once take it at any value at all. There are several things I would have to know before I would even take it under consideration. I would have to know when and where the remark was made, to whom it was made and under what circumstances it was made. I would want to know whether my friend was in a serious or jocular mood, and if it appeared that he was not joking I would want to know what had led up to the remark and what followed it. And if my neighbour could not enlighten me on any of these points I would show him the door and dismiss the remark along with him. I would not be worthy of my friend if I took to heart what my neighbour told me, when on his own confession he did not even know what my friend was talking about. Certainly I would not allow such a man to interpret my friend's words for me. I would not even allow him to interpret my dog's bark for me.

III

We are never quite so unfair—certainly we are never so inexcusably unfair as when we insist upon holding a man responsible for his words just as they stand without regard to their connection or to

the circumstances under which they were spoken. I can make a man say anything I wish by that method. I can prove him to be a liar or a thief or a saint or anything else by that method. We have a few sayings which are as complete in themselves as gems, and like gems they will shine whether you take them out of their setting or not. But most of our sentences, however illuminating they may appear, are not like gems: they are like eyes, and the moment you take them out of their sockets their light is gone. Who would care to be judged or to have his eyes judged by a man who never saw his eyes until a surgeon took them out of their sockets and carried them to him?

All this goes without saying and yet for nearly two thousand years the average Christian teacher has been cutting the words of Jesus out of their connection, as a surgeon would cut an eye out of its socket, and holding them up before the world and demanding that they should be accepted just as they appear, regardless of where they came from or any other consideration whatsoever.

We verily thought a few years ago that we were outgrowing this childish habit, but the World War rudely broke the spell of that fond illusion. The World War was not a month old before learned college professors were springing to their feet all over the land to remind us of what Jesus told us about turning the other cheek, and to warn us that if we did not take His words literally we were not

followers of the Master Teacher. Every day we were told that if those words did not mean just what they appeared to mean on the surface they did not mean anything.

And everywhere, until the day of America's entrance into the war, the sentiment was received with vigorous applause.

That was the way we treated the words of Jesus. And we did it in spite of the fact that we knew that if the courts of the land were allowed to interpret a man's words as those men treated the words of Jesus, there was not a learned professor in America who could not be convicted of a capital offense and sentenced to the electric chair!

It is possible for even learned professors to yield to the temptation to follow the lines of easiest resistance, and it is not necessary to assume that this strange habit persists for any other reason than that the race (including its learned professors) is still human. Doubtless it is mainly because it is so easy that intelligent teachers are still engaged in the unintelligent task of pulling the sayings of Jesus out of their sockets and interpreting them without regard to where they came from; and it is for the same reason that the average audience, however intelligent it may be, is still meekly if not enthusiastically swallowing their interpretations. It was because it was so much easier to accept than to question that those antebellum audiences so readily accepted the Master's command to turn the

other cheek without so much as stopping to ask whether the Master ever turned His own cheek.

It is not mainly because the world does not want to fall in with the teachings of Jesus that it treats Him so unfairly. It is true that we treat Him worse than men usually treat their enemies. It is true that we take advantage of His words in the same way that a conscienceless browbeating lawyer would take advantage of the words of a witness to prove him a liar, and that we do this in spite of the fact that we have no patience with any man who quotes the words of his opponent unfairly, however unfair his opponent may have been to him. Nevertheless, so long as there are good Christians in the world who are unfair to Jesus it cannot be said that the world is unfair to Him only because it hates Him. It is unfair mainly because it has fallen into a lazy mental habit.

IV

That well-meaning but painfully short-sighted individual who cut up the Bible into verses and thereby prepared the way for the use and abuse of so-called proof-texts, is probably responsible for more misinterpretations of the words of Jesus than all the enemies of Jesus put together. It would be interesting to trace the influence of the proof-text habit upon popular religious beliefs during the last three centuries. Even as late as twenty-five years ago the method of proving a doctrine by proof-

texts was in high favour almost everywhere outside of our college communities. In those days nearly every preacher's library contained one or more well-thumbed proof-text reference books. I recall at this moment a monumental work which not a few preachers were using largely in the place of the Bible itself—a book composed entirely of Biblical verses arranged under the doctrines which they were supposed to prove or support. All a busy man had to do when called upon to defend a favourite doctrine was to go to this book and copy all the verses that were printed under that head. Thus equipped, he was ready to stand before kings.

A hundred years ago the proof-text habit was so strong that it was not uncommon for a hard-pressed preacher to yield to the temptation to improve on the original method by leaving out a part of a verse to make the text come nearer meaning what he wished to teach. A threadbare story that has come down to us from those simple times tells of a pioneer preacher who, unable to find a text from which he might preach a sermon against the new feminine fashion of wearing the "knot" on top of the head, naively cut from the text "Let him that is upon the housetop not come down," the first six and a half words ("Let him that is upon the house-"), and confidently announced the remainder as the Master's command to his feminine hearers: "Top-not, come down!"

This so-called proof-text method (which has never proved anything except the depths to which mental laziness can carry us) shares with our inherited paganism the responsibility for nearly all of the popular misinterpretations of the Master's teachings that are current to-day. It was this method, more than anything else, that led to the now widely prevalent habit of interpreting His words as if they were spoken by an Occidental instead of by an Oriental. It would be interesting to know just how much this slovenly habit has cost us. It would not be so bad if it were only a sin of ignorance; it is worse: it is a sin of carelessness, which unhappily is not confined to the illiterate.

When a newly arrived Oriental opens his little shop on the next corner we console ourselves (after our first futile attempts at modest trade) with the reflection that as soon as he understands our language he will be able to understand us. And usually he cheers himself with the same thought. But when at last he succeeds in understanding what we say, we discover that he has only made a beginning. To an Oriental it is a far cry from the point of understanding what we say to the point of understanding what we mean. And so it is with Occidentals, like ourselves: long after we have mastered the words of our Oriental neighbour in the little store on the corner we are still struggling desperately with our strangely fatal tendency to take them backwards.

To know what an Oriental means I must not only know his language, but I must know how he uses it. I must know something of his mind—how it works; whether it is logical according to the Western idea or not. I must bear in mind as I listen to his words that he is philosophical and not scientific; that while he thinks in figures, they are not Arabic figures but figures of speech. I must learn his peculiar ways of expressing himself. Also I must learn something of his emotional nature; something of his heart; something of his life; something of his knowledge; something of his ideals and character. In a word, to know what he means I must know the man himself.

All this is plain enough as to the Oriental on the corner and in our dealings with him we usually keep these things in mind. We try to be fair. We try to remember that he is an Oriental and that we have no right to make his words mean what they would mean if they were spoken by Smith or Jones or by ourselves. And yet when we come to the words of Jesus, somehow we forget. Somehow our first impulse is to make them mean just what they would mean if they were spoken by a modern American to an American audience.

Of course we are not wholly without excuse. We can say that as a matter of fact Jesus was wonderfully cosmopolitan and that His words are much plainer than the words of any other Oriental teacher, ancient or modern. And we can say that

His message is as cosmopolitan as He was, and is so well adapted to all times and places and races that no nation or tribe has ever been found where men could not understand His Gospel well enough to accept it and be saved. Nevertheless, the fact remains that when Jesus came into the world He took upon Himself our humanity with its limitations; that whatever may be said of the cosmopolitan character of His mind and message, He was born an Oriental Jew, brought up as an Oriental Jew, taught to think and express His thoughts as a Jew of Palestine of His own century, and to the end of His life spoke as an Oriental to audiences of Orientals. We must not lose sight of the fact that if He had not expressed His thoughts as an Oriental his hearers would not have understood Him and the world would never have heard of Him.

V

Elsewhere[1] in a discussion of the Oriental character of the Master's teachings I have used this illustration:

"In His walks abroad Jesus was always followed by a crowd. It was a terribly hungry crowd. Now and then He would turn and speak to them and His words would be as the handful of

[1] "What Did Jesus Really Teach About War?" Fleming H. Revell Company.

corn which the farmer throws out now and then to toll his pigs along. They would follow Him all day if He would only give them a word now and then. Sometimes His sayings would melt their hearts; sometimes they would pierce them; sometimes they would confuse them; but they would take everything He gave them and follow on for more.

"One day He suddenly turned about and with a severity which must have startled them said:

"'If a man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

"It was a horrible speech. At least so it would have sounded in our ears. If a teacher of a new religion should utter such a sentiment before an American audience to-day he would be hissed off the platform. If the people who listened to Jesus that day had listened with our ears they would have done worse. They would have cast dust into the air. They would have thrown stones at Him. They would have cursed Him as a blasphemer; for in their minds reverence for parents was inseparable from reverence for God.

"But they were Orientals and they listened with Oriental ears. And because they listened with Oriental ears nothing happened. As the last word fell from His lips He turned and went on His way, and the multitude followed on quietly as before.

"No doubt His severity had startled them, but they were not worried. They were not worried because they knew how to take Him. They had heard Him before. They had looked into His face before. Time and again they had caught a glimpse of His soul; and when you once get a glimpse of a man's soul you will interpret his words by what you see in his soul and not take them as they appear on their faces. And in their Teacher's soul they had never seen anything but love. They knew that He loved everybody and they knew that if there was anything in the world that He hated it was hate. He would not even let them hate their enemies. He even demanded that they should love their enemies. It was impossible to conceive that He would have them hate their own fathers and mothers. Whatever He might mean, He could not mean that.

"And that was not all. They not only knew what He did not mean but they knew what He did mean. Being Orientals they were accustomed to speeches of that sort. They talked that way themselves. They had to talk that way. Everybody in the East talks that way to-day. Everybody talks in pictures, especially pictures of violent and startling contrasts. It is the only way you can make yourself understood. If I wanted to impress an American with the height of the mountains near my home I would give him the exact figures; but if I were talking to a Syrian I would

give him no figures at all: I would only give him a figure of speech. I would point to his little mountains and I would say: 'Ah! you should see my mountains. By the side of my mountains those little hills yonder would be mere holes in the ground.' And he would understand. If I should say that my mountains rise seven thousand feet above the level of the sea it would mean nothing to him at all.

"And so when Jesus told the crowd that day that if a man hated not his father and mother he could not be His disciple, they knew what He was trying to do. They knew that He was simply trying to impress upon them an important teaching by means of a picture of violent and startling contrasts. And the moment they looked upon the picture they saw what it meant. They saw a man so bent upon following his teacher that he was even willing to renounce his own father and mother. It did not suggest hate; it only suggested devotion —wonderful devotion. And so they knew that what the Master was thinking about was not how they should feel toward their fathers and mothers, but how they should feel toward Him. He was not thinking of hate at all; He was thinking of love. And they knew that what He meant was not that they must hate others, but that they must love Him and must love Him supremely. 'Unless you put me before all things; unless I am everything to you, you cannot be my disciple.'" . . .

I hope I have made my meaning clear. The words of Jesus are the words of an Oriental spoken to an Oriental audience, and if we would understand Him we must put ourselves as far as possible in the place of that audience. As far as possible we must look at Him through Oriental eyes and listen to Him with Oriental ears. For, as I have said, to understand His words we must know the Man. The Master has left us some sayings that are as complete in themselves as the stars that shine by their own light, and one can understand them without even stopping to inquire who uttered them; but many of His sayings are like many of ours: that is, they are like eyes; the moment you separate them from their sockets the light is gone. The moment you separate them from the Man who uttered them the light is gone. Take such sayings as, "Ask and ye shall receive," or "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it," apart from the general tenor of the Master's teaching, apart from the Master Himself—His mind, His heart, His life—and they have no more light in them than eyeballs torn out of their sockets or electric bulbs disconnected from the wires. It is only when we make connection between the Man and His words that the light comes.

VI

But the habit of interpreting the words of an Oriental as if they were spoken by an Occidental

is not the only evil that has grown out of the proof-text method. When one has yielded to the temptation to interpret the words of Jesus without regard to their connection it is only a question of time when he will begin to jumble them together without regard to their logical or natural order. And if he happens to be a teacher he will fall into the fatal pedagogical error of teaching them without regard to their logical or natural order. This is one of the secrets of the present widespread confusion as to the meaning of prayer in the minds of our young people. I have rarely known a mother or even a Sunday-school teacher who did not teach the subject of prayer backwards. Jesus did not study pedagogy, but He was always pedagogical. Nowhere in His teachings do you find Him putting the cart before the horse, as we would say nowadays, or the tree before the seed, or the stream before the spring. He never taught a truth growing out of another truth until He had taught that other truth. He did not attempt to teach His disciples the senior course in their kindergarten years, though He was often compelled to return to the kindergarten course in their senior years. He knew the mind of man and He never forgot how necessary it is in teaching a series of related truths to begin at the bottom instead of at the top. In teaching His Gospel He began with repentance, which a mere child could understand, and ended with the mystical union of the Vine and the

Branches, something which only those who had entered that union could understand. In teaching His doctrine of prayer He began with the idea of going to the Father, as a child would go to his earthly father—something the humblest beginner could grasp—and led on up to that wonderful formula—" In my name,"—a mystery which can be fully grasped only by mature minds long accustomed to delve in the deep things of God.[1]

The average teacher pursues an exactly opposite course. Instead of beginning at the beginning he begins at the end. Long before he undertakes to place prayer in the mind of the child upon the ground of Fatherhood—sometimes even before he has taught him to call God his Father—he undertakes to teach him to ask in Jesus' name, which no mind can possibly grasp that is not familiar with the idea of Fatherhood. As a consequence his pupils, seeing no reason for it, consider that it is a purely artificial formula and proceed to use it as such. It would be difficult to find a child trained in the average home or the average Sunday-school who is not under the impression that if he wants his prayers answered he must not forget to say " For Jesus' sake " at the end.

We have taught our children many harmful things, but aside from that most unchristian of all religious teachings—the teaching that God does not love us when we are bad—I can think of noth-

[1] See Chapter X.

ing in the whole history of religious training that has done so much harm to the cause of Christ as this absurd custom of solemnly assuring our children before they have clearly grasped a single idea of prayer, that if they will ask God for what they want and say, "For Jesus' sake," they will get it. . . .

We need not pursue the matter further. While we have only touched the fringes of the subject we have seen enough of our misinterpretations of the Master's teachings and of the slovenly mental habits which are accountable for many of them, to realize how largely they are responsible for the persistence of our pagan ideas and, in consequence, for the present distressing religious situation, and to form some idea of the general direction in which we must look for relief. Plainly we cannot continue to stand where we are to-day. When men's knees tremble something must be done. And men's knees are trembling to-day. The steady crumbling of the foundations of faith that exist in the popular mind threatens soon to leave the average Christian in the predicament of Noah's dove—with no place to rest the soles of his feet,—and we must look for firmer foundations. We must look for firmer foundations while we may. And we must look for them in the only place where we can hope to find them—in the message of the Master Teacher. For a thousand years we were content

to ask what the Church taught about prayer. For the last fifty years or more we have been anxiously asking what science has to say about it. It is time we were going back to the simple days of primitive Christianity, before the Church acquired its voice of authority and before science acquired a voice at all, and asking, as all earnest believers asked in those days, What did the Master say about it? What did Jesus really teach about prayer?

V

WHAT PRAYER MEANT TO JESUS

I

TO most people who are content with a second-hand knowledge of God, prayer is simply a device for getting something for nothing or for as near nothing as possible. It may be the act of a beggar or it may be the act of a trader: in either case it is an effort of him who has not to get at the resources of him who has. In other words, it is a purely selfish undertaking in which no interests or wishes are regarded except one's own. As for God, He is not supposed to have any part in the matter except as a source of supply. He is like the head of the family in a home in which fathers are supposed to be devices created solely for the convenience of children who have purses to fill.

In the teachings of Jesus selfishness, instead of being the soul of prayer, is its worst enemy. Selfishness cannot enter prayer without killing it. Instead of being the cry of a selfish heart, prayer is the cry of a heart that is struggling to get rid of self; a heart that is struggling to dethrone self and

to put God in its place. To Jesus a man does not really approach God in prayer so long as his mind is centered in himself; he approaches Him only when he is more concerned about God's interests and will than his own, or when he is struggling to put God's interests and will ahead of his own.

When Jesus came the mercenary idea of prayer was practically universal. Apparently the only human beings in those days who cried to God unselfishly—thinking first of all of God's will and then of the needs of their fellow-men and lastly of their own needs—were a few choice spirits among the Jews, such as Simeon and Anna, "who waited for the consolation of Israel," and a few earnest seekers after God groping about here and there in the vast darkness of heathendom. The great mass of humanity was self-centered. There were warm-hearted men and women who had pity upon the poor and the suffering, and there were a few devoted worshippers who had conceived something of a passion for God, but nowhere was there anything like what we call nowadays a passion for humanity. Selfishness was written large all over the face of the earth.

It was natural that the world in that day should think of prayer as the utterance of selfish desire. Men went to God's altar simply with the hope of getting what they wanted. It was no business of theirs what God wanted or what their fellow-men needed. It was a matter of attending to one's own

business. A man wanted rain for his crops and he valued prayer as a device which sometimes brought rain; and he used it whenever his crops needed it without stopping to ask what other men's crops might need or whether it would accord with God's plans or laws. It was none of his business to inquire whether the rain that would help his crop might not also send a freshet down the river that would destroy a hundred men's crops; and as for God's plans or laws, he never gave a thought to them.

And very naturally there had grown up around this mercenary idea of prayer a tangle of equally absurd ideas, such as we associate nowadays with a wizard's mysterious gestures or a poor illiterate's treasured left hind-foot of a graveyard rabbit. They thought of their prayers as having virtue in them. Either there was a hidden magical power in them or else there was something about them that would cause God to keep account of them and place them to their credit—something to encourage them to believe that they would be heard if they would only say their prayers often enough or long enough. Even among the Jews of that day it was commonly believed that men would be heard for their "much speaking."

II

To Jesus these ideas were not only foolish but utterly repugnant. His sensitive soul shrank from

the proud Pharisee standing on the street corner mumbling his prayers—shrank as a beautiful, refined woman would shrink from a loathsome leper. There were two things about men which He seemed never to have been quite prepared for: one was that men could doubt the Father's care and the other was that they could so entirely misjudge the Father's mind and heart. How could any sane man doubt his Father? And how could any sane man imagine that he could influence his Father simply by repeating certain words regardless of the state of his mind or heart? Or how could anybody imagine that the Father would be pleased with one's prayers when one was not really praying at all, but only saying prayers on the street corners to make people think he was pious?

All this was as horrifying to the Master as the attempt of an unnatural child to work "tricks" on his father for gain would be to us. He could not think of the prayers of the Pharisees as real prayers: they were only pagan tricks. To His mind prayer was not a beggar's scheme or a trader's device: it was a child's privilege. To the pagan it was a plot to get something from God; to Jesus it was the privilege of unbosoming oneself to one's heavenly Father. It was not primarily an opportunity to get something but an opportunity to give something. The world thought of prayer only in connection with its answer; it was not interested in anything except the answer. Jesus also

thought of the answer, and He urged men to pray with the expectation of receiving an answer, but He did not urge them to pray because He regarded the answer as the only thing or even the main thing that made prayer worth while. To His mind prayer was not given to us mainly that we might get what we asked for, any more than the privilege of going to one's father or mother was given to children mainly that they might get what they asked for.

Fathers and mothers can provide for their children's wants fairly well without any suggestions from them, and if there were no other reason why a child should go to his parents it is not likely that in the development of the family this privilege would have come to be generally recognized. Most parents would have said that they knew better what John needed than he did and didn't care to be bothered with his suggestions. Time was too precious anyway. But fathers and mothers came in the course of time to realize that while they could provide for their children's material wants without any help from them, there were other and more important needs—needs of the mind and heart—which they could not meet unless their children would open their minds and hearts to them. And so as the race developed, wise parents began to take time to cultivate their children's companionship. John was encouraged to unbosom himself to his father. Mary was encouraged to

open her heart and lay bare all its secrets to her mother.

It was not until God put it into the hearts of men and women to look after the higher needs of their children and thus led them to make bosom companions of them that the race got its first real start toward its divine destiny. That was the real beginning of the home. Before that the race had only eating and sleeping places. When children began to have the privilege of living in the presence of their parents, and parents grew sufficiently concerned for their eternal welfare to look after their minds and hearts, and children began to unbosom themselves to them, there was brought about a situation which made the development of the race to manhood possible. Children now had a chance to aim at manhood with patterns of manhood before their eyes, and those who had the privilege of opening their minds and hearts to highly developed parents had a chance to imbibe their spirit and ideals and to grow up with their guidance and sympathy toward real manhood.

To realize what this means we have only to reflect upon what the world to-day thinks of the chances of its young people. Who expects anything of the boy who is growing up in an environment that furnishes no pattern of high manhood to live by, no manly spirit to breathe, no manly ideals to inspire him, no manly guide to help him along the way? And where is the man who does

not believe that the luckiest boy in the world is the boy who is on the chummiest of terms with a good father?

III

To achieve manhood a boy must have a chance to grow up in intimate, sympathetic touch with a developed man—either with his father or with somebody who will take the place of a father. I have heard of men who grew up to greatness from a childhood that knew no home but a barrel in the alley and no friends but an occasional dog; but I have never seen one nor have I ever known anybody who had seen one. Men have risen from such depths to great heights of what the world calls success, but I have never known one to achieve high manhood, which is the only true greatness. If one will inquire into the life of a truly great man who came up from a barrel in the alley, one will find that somewhere in childhood or early youth he came into sympathetic touch with a real man, and that it was largely through the inspiration and guidance of this heaven-sent friend that he found and climbed the path that leads upward.

If a boy who would become a real man must have the benefit of sympathetic contact with a father who has achieved real manhood (or a mother or friend who will take the place of such a father) it would seem to follow that if he would

achieve the highest manhood—the manhood of a Son of God—he must have in addition the benefit of sympathetic contact with the Father of his spirit. This is the great fundamental reason for prayer. This is why Jesus urged His followers to pray. Prayer is a privilege which the Father has given His children to help them to grow to manhood as His sons. It was not given us primarily that we might ask for the things we need or think we need, but rather to provide for greater needs than we are likely to think of—needs which we never think of until we have really learned to pray. Jesus does indeed encourage us to ask for things, but He does it just as a wise and loving father encourages a timid child to ask for things. A loving father encourages his child to come to him about his needs, not because he wants to know what he needs—he knows what the child needs before he asks,—but because he wants to bring about that loving intimacy between his child and himself which is so essential to his development to real manhood. So Jesus encourages us to ask the Father for things, not that the Father may know what we need, "for the Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him;" but because He wants to bring about that loving intimacy between the Father and His children which is so essential to their development to the highest spiritual manhood. . . .

I hope no one will infer from what I have said

that the question whether God answers prayer or not is of little importance. It is of very great importance. It is of stupendous importance. If the Father had encouraged us to go to Him about our needs in order that we might thereby keep in sympathetic touch with Him, and then paid no attention to our requests, His plan would have been a failure from the start and in a little while men would have ceased to pray. It matters little that men believe in God if they do not believe in a prayer-answering God. Nevertheless the fact remains that God is something more than a prayer-answering God, just as a father is something more than a family purse, and if we regard prayer as nothing more than the privilege of going to God for what we want we shall fail as miserably as does the child who thinks of his father as nothing more than the family purse. In other words the supreme end of prayer is not the supply of our immediate needs, but *the attainment of that harmonious and loving relationship with the Father which is essential to the achievement of our high destiny as His sons.*

IV

This idea of prayer comes out very clearly in the model prayer which Jesus gave His followers and even more clearly in that wonderfully intimate prayer which followed His memorable talk with His disciples the night before His death. In the

Lord's Prayer the first thought is of the Father—the Father Himself; the Father's name, the Father's kingdom, the Father's will. These first three petitions are utterances of perfect harmony with the Father and they help us to get into and to preserve harmonious touch with Him. Not until we have set His will and interests foremost in our hearts are we in a position to speak of our personal needs, and these we do not mention with selfish motives: we ask these things—bread, forgiveness, protection in temptation and deliverance from all evil, not that we may have an easy time, but that we may be able to lend a helping hand in bringing to pass the things for which we have just prayed—the hallowing of His name, the establishment of His kingdom, the supremacy of His will in the earth. Even forgiveness, as the Master quickly explained, could not be asked for selfishly: that petition was bound up with the matter of forgiving those who have sinned against us.

In His prayer uttered the night before His death we have perhaps the most beautiful as well as the most perfect expression of absolute selflessness that has come down to us. It is true that the prayer begins with a petition to the Father to glorify His Son, but it is plain that the Son desires to be glorified simply that He may more perfectly glorify the Father. The first thought that comes to us as we listen to His voice in this prayer is that here at last is One who wants nothing for

Himself. Even at this supremely critical moment, when His life is hanging by a thread—a thread which He knows will break on to-morrow —he wants nothing for Himself. When a man's life is in peril we don't expect him to think of others: we expect him to think of himself. But here is one who at the moment when men are most selfish and when nobody expects them to think of anybody's will but their own, is so absorbed in the Father's will that He does not think of Himself except as a means of furthering that will.

But the utter selflessness that runs through this prayer is hardly so wonderful as the loving harmony with the Father which pervades it. No wonder His words fall upon our ears like music. Here is prayer at its highest: beyond this the Master Himself could not go. And this is not all: it is not only the highest achievement in prayer, but it is the highest achievement of prayer. When prayer brings us into perfect harmony with the Father it has achieved that beyond which it cannot go. No answer that praying men have received from the Father has ever gone beyond that.

This then is what prayer meant to Jesus—not the cry of a beggar, nor the business proposition of a trader, but the unbosoming of oneself to one's heavenly Father. And not the mere unbosoming of one's wishes with an eye to getting what one wants, but the unbosoming of oneself—the su-

preme aim being, as I have said, to bring about and perpetuate that fellowship between the Father and His children that is essential to the achievement of their eternal destiny as His children.

The unbosoming of oneself! Somewhere I have said that it is as essential for a man to look up into the face of the Father as it is for a baby to look up into the face of its mother. A baby simply must look up into its mother's eyes or the eyes of some one who can take its mother's place; denied this privilege it will soon cease to live. Science has taught us that a little baby lives largely on his mother's life; that there is something in her that goes out through her loving attentions that takes hold of his little life and helps him along. So a man must look up into the face of the Father: denied this privilege he is already dead.

This looking up into the face of the Father is prayer. Prayer is not a mere matter of words, Jesus tells us. It is not a matter of opening one's lips: it is a matter of opening one's heart. It is a matter of going to the Father and unbosoming oneself to Him: going with all that is in one's heart; going with the impulses or motives which prompt a loving, dutiful child to go to his earthly father; going under the impulse of gratitude to tell Him how thankful we are: going with our burden of sin to ask His forgiveness; going with our tangled problems to get Him to untangle them; going with empty hearts that He may fill them; go-

ing with broken hearts that He may heal them; going with yearning hearts—just to be with Him.

Just to be with Him! There is nothing in prayer beyond that. When we begin to pray we go to God because we want so many things; by and by we don't care so much about things: we want to be with Him. And that is prayer's climax. I am sure we never pull so hard upon the Father's heart-strings as when we go to Him just to be with Him.

VI

THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH JESUS RESTED PRAYER

I

THE pagan idea was that there is something in a prayer—a mysterious power or a hidden value—which if brought to bear upon God may attract Him, propitiate Him, or in some way cause Him to change His mind, and come to the help of the supplicant. This is still the dominant idea in the world, though in many minds it exists in a more or less modified form. Thus the popular notion to-day is that the thing which attracts God is not the prayer itself, but the faith that is behind it and that runs through it. But whether the idea is found in its original or a modified form, the ground upon which it rests is always something outside of God. The pagan prays because he has faith in the power or virtue of his prayers and the paganized Christian (or, more accurately, the Christianized pagan) prays because he has faith in the power of faith. Apparently a large majority of Christians nowadays pray either because they believe in the power

of prayer or because they believe in the power of faith.

Jesus did not believe in either. He did not put His faith either in His prayers or in the faith with which He prayed; He put it in the God who answers prayer. There is nothing in His teachings to indicate that He regarded a man's prayer as having any power or value in itself. The magical ideas which so many good people think they find in His references to faith and prayer do not exist outside of pagan minds and the minds of Christians who have kept their inherited pagan ideas alive by interpreting the words of Jesus as if they were the words of a literalist. If we insist upon taking His manifestly figurative sayings literally —such sayings, for example, as that about mountain-removing faith—we shall find in His teachings about faith and prayer enough superstition to satisfy the most devout pagan heart; but if we insist upon knowing not merely what He said, but what He intended His words to mean, we shall find His teachings as far from superstitious ideas as the teachings of modern science itself.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray He had no thought of initiating them into the mysteries of magic. He did not regard even His own model prayer as having any virtue in itself. Indeed He was careful to remind His disciples that it did not have any virtue in itself. No matter how often they might repeat it, if they

did not pray in the spirit which it required of them it would not do them any good. For instance, a man who was not willing to forgive those who trespassed against him might pray "Forgive us our trespasses" until doomsday and he would never be forgiven.

To Jesus the value of a prayer depended not upon its form or contents or upon some mysterious power hidden in it, but upon the grounds upon which the supplicant rested it, the motives which prompted it, and the spirit in which it was offered. The world had made a failure of prayer largely because it had been resting its prayers upon wrong grounds. Some men prayed because they believed in the power of prayer, others because they believed in the power of faith. Some found a ground for prayer in the mercy of God; others in God's power to do as He pleased; others in the ability of man to move God to come to his help, either by exciting His pity, or by appealing to His interests, or by winning His favour, or by teasing and worrying Him. Jesus did not find a sufficient reason for prayer in any of these things. He could not rest prayer upon a magical power which He well knew did not exist. Nor could He rest it upon God's mercy or upon God's power. The fact that God is merciful is no assurance that He will show mercy to every man who asks for it. So the mere fact that God has the power to do as He pleases is no encouragement to pray—certainly not to the

man who has no assurance that God will use His power in his behalf. Nor could Jesus find a sufficient reason for prayer in man's alleged ability to move God. He knew the Father too well to be attracted by the heathenish superstition that God was a cold-hearted, busy, deeply-absorbed ruler who needed to be taken hold of and reminded of certain things that ought to be done and then persuaded to do them.

II

To Jesus there were just two adequate grounds for prayer. One was the ground that a child has for unbosoming himself to his father. The other was the ground that men have for expecting a need in nature to be supplied. A child has one good and sufficient reason for going to his father and that is the fact that he is his father. A farmer has one good and sufficient reason for expecting a plant's need to be supplied and that is that the plant has been brought into harmony with the law that governs plant life and has thereby come into vital touch with the sources of supply. According to Jesus a man has both of these reasons for praying. He can unbosom himself to God because God is his Father. And he can look to God to supply his needs for the additional reason that the moment he comes into harmony with God's will or law he is in vital touch with the Supreme Source of Supply.

Let us examine these two grounds. First, God is our Father. If a child has sufficient encouragement to go to his father in the fact that he is his father, surely we have sufficient encouragement to go to God in the fact that He is our heavenly Father. If we fathers, with all our limitations and handicaps, can usually do for our children that which is wisest and best, surely we can go to our heavenly Father with full assurance that He will do for us that which is wisest and best.

I do not wonder that Jesus pointed out this ground of prayer first. For myself I am free to admit that, knowing what I know now, if I could not think of God as the Father of men, nothing could encourage me to pray. Millions of pagans who have not heard that God is the father of men do pray, but if the light of modern intelligence should suddenly burst upon them and reveal to them all that we know except that God is the Father of men, they would never pray again. In the light of modern intelligence none of the grounds upon which pagans (or Christians who are dominated by pagan ideas) rest prayer appeal to us. We may resort to prayer desperately on almost any ground; but we do not feel that we have a good and sufficient reason for prayer until we come face to face with the truth that God is our Father. If God is our Father of course that settles it. If that isn't a sufficient reason why I should pray there is no sufficient reason.

Jesus encourages us to pray by revealing God to us as our Father. Surely that is encouragement enough. If He is our Father we may go to Him, we must go to Him, we shall want to go to Him. If He is not our Father I can see no satisfactory reason for going to Him at all; but if He is our Father then —

"Well," says Jesus, "just make a self case of it. You are a father. Would you deny your son the privilege of coming to you? And if he should come to you would you turn a deaf ear to his petitions? Would you treat him cruelly or rudely or even indifferently? If he should ask for bread would you give him a stone—a little, round, brown stone that looks like bread—to mock his hunger? Or if he should ask for a fish would you give him a serpent?—something which, instead of nourishing him would harm him? Perish the thought! No father—no human father—could mock his hungry son or knowingly put into his hands anything that would hurt him, no matter what he might ask for. Very well; if you feel that way about human fathers—if you have that much confidence in your own fatherly heart—is there any reason why you should not go to your heavenly Father? Can you conceive that you might find your heavenly Father less fatherly, less loving, less wise than you are? You can trust a wise and loving father who has practically unlimited means to do all for his children that his love and wis-

dom may prompt him to do. Can you not trust your heavenly Father, who has absolutely unlimited means, to do all for you that His love and wisdom may prompt Him to do?"

III

But Jesus did not rest prayer upon the Fatherhood of God alone. The ground of Fatherhood would satisfy His Oriental audience (no Oriental audience could fail to appreciate and respond to the appeal of fatherhood), and it would satisfy all Occidentals who had entered into the experience of fatherhood and who had fathomed the hearts of their own fathers; but there were others. And in the ages to come there would be many more. In the ages to come there would be millions of cold, literal Occidentals, who could not associate reality with sentiment, to whom the appeal of fatherhood would mean nothing but sentiment, and whose minds could not be satisfied with anything less than scientific truth, and these would need another and a quite different ground. I do not mean that Jesus had the modern Western mind in view when He pointed to this second ground, but the fact remains that this second ground is as perfectly adapted to the requirement of the modern Western mind as the first ground was to the ancient Oriental mind.

It was long before the days of science, but when Jesus said to His followers, "If ye abide in me,

and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you," He uttered a truth that was and is as scientific as any established fact in modern biology. It is true that He did not present it in a scientific setting (scientific settings had not yet been invented), and for this reason few scientists have ever stumbled upon it, but one only needs to translate it into modern terms to recognize its scientific character. Translated into modern terms this statement rests upon the established scientific fact that all supplies come through harmony with law. All things—plants, birds, trees, men—have their needs supplied just to the extent to which they harmonize with law. If every part of a plant comes perfectly into line with the law of its being, every part of it is open to the sources of supply and its needs will be perfectly met. So with everything else in the material world. When Jesus came the world had not yet made this discovery, though it had come to the fringes of it; but Jesus had gone beyond it: He had discovered that this was true of the world of spirit. Whether His wonderfully discerning mind had given any thought to the scientific fact that physical supplies come through harmony with physical law or not we do not know; but it is clear that this remarkable statement rests upon the equally scientific fact that the supplies that man as a spiritual being needs come through harmony with God's spiritual law.

"What you need for the fulfillment of your mission in this world," He is here saying to His disciples, "will come to you just to the extent to which you harmonize with the Divine will or law, the Supreme Source of Supply. My whole being is in perfect harmony with the Father's will. If you will abide in me so that my words or will may abide in you—if you will bring your whole being into line with me—with the Father—so that every part will harmonize with the Father's will or law—as a man presses a crooked stick up against a straight wall until every part of the stick is in perfect line with it, then you will be in vital communication with the Supreme Source of Supply, just as a branch of a vine is in vital communication with the supplies of the vine; and thus, having no will but the Father's, all that you may desire for the fulfillment of your mission as His children will be supplied."

IV

Here then are the two grounds upon which prayer rests in the teaching of Jesus. To His mind there are just two good and sufficient reasons why men should pray: one is that God is the Father of men and the other is that supplies come through harmony with God's will or law. The first ground appeals largely to the heart; the second appeals to the mind: when we put them together I know of nothing more convincing or

encouraging. There is nothing unreasonable in them: the only unreasonable thing that they suggest to us is the childish attitude which a large part of the human race still assumes toward them. The scientific agnostic still hoots at the appeal of Fatherhood as sentimental nonsense, while millions of Christians still proceed with their prayers on the pagan assumption that the way to get into harmony with God's will is to get Him to fall in with theirs. If a tree that had been torn up by the roots should cry to heaven for food to keep it from dying we should laugh at it. We should say that even a wooden-head should know that so long as a tree is out of harmony with the law that governs its growth it will never have its needs supplied. What that tree needs to do is to get back to its place and fall into harmony with law. And yet when we are in need, instead of going to God for the purpose of getting into harmony with Him and His law, we go with the hope of inducing Him to come down and fall in with us and our wishes.

I imagine that this is about the hardest truth to learn that the human race has ever run against. Down to the time of Jesus nobody seems to have grasped it except a little handful of illumined Hebrews and an isolated seeker after God here and there among heathen peoples. All through the ages the race as a whole had spent its hours of prayer in more or less desperate efforts to induce God to drop His affairs and come down and har-

monize His will with theirs. It seemed never to have occurred to anybody but a few prophets and saints that God might prefer that they should drop their affairs and try to harmonize their will with His. And now after nearly two thousand years of the Master's teachings the greater part of the race is still falling into the same old error. Instead of pressing our poor crooked selves up against the straight line of His will that we may be in perfect harmony with Him, and thus be in vital communication with our Source of Supply, we are trying in our prayers to induce Him to bend the straight line of His will and make it harmonize with us!

VII

HARMONY WITH GOD

I

IF I have correctly stated the view of Jesus it is plain that the popular conception of prayer is largely the result of misplaced emphasis. Under the influence of our inherited pagan ideas and the misinterpretations of Jesus which our pagan tendencies have encouraged, we have been placing the emphasis upon what prayer brings to us instead of upon what prayer brings about in us. We have been thinking of prayer as something that brings good down to us rather than as something that develops good within us. We have been praying to bring God into harmony with us so that He will give us what we want, rather than to bring ourselves into harmony with God so that we may give Him what He wants. In a word we have been placing the emphasis upon prayer's answer —its immediate purpose—instead of upon its great end, the attainment of that perfect oneness with God, in comparison with which an immediate answer to prayer is merely incidental.

Jesus wants us to ask that we may receive, but

evidently He is far more anxious that we should receive the great benefits of communion with the Father than the things we usually ask the Father for. A wise father wants his son to ask of him that he may receive, but what he is chiefly concerned about is the far greater benefit that will come to the boy when he has gotten into the habit of freely going to him about his wants. Nothing that a boy is likely to ask of his father is worth a fraction of what he will receive when, by unbosoming himself to his father, he has come into perfect harmony with him.

The supreme end of prayer, I repeat, is not its answer, but harmony with the Father.

Let us think a little while about this matter. I have said somewhere that the secret of a perfect rose is perfect harmony with law. Some good people give the credit to a Burbank. But there were a few perfect roses in the world long before our experts came around. Unquestionably the Burbanks have helped, for perfect roses are now plentiful; but if the average rose had been as self-willed as the average man, we would not have had many more perfect roses in the world last June than we had perfect people, Burbanks or no Burbanks.

The secret of every perfect rose is perfect harmony with law. A rose achieves its highest destiny and perfectly fulfills its mission only when it falls into perfect harmony with the will of the

Creator of roses, as expressed in the laws of nature. Harmony with law is the thing that gives it its chance. Perfect harmony with law brings every part of its being into vital contact with an environment that perfectly meets its needs. It makes available everything it must have to achieve its destiny. Not everything it must have to satisfy its whims, but everything it must have to serve the will of the Creator of roses. The moment it falls into perfect harmony with law, His law, everything that the Creator of roses has that a rose needs becomes available for its use. At that moment it may ask what it will and it shall be done unto it.

What a Burbank does is to help a rose get into perfect line with the will of the Creator of roses, that every pore of its being may be open to and in touch with the Creator's sources of supply.

The secret of a developed man—a man who has reached the heights of spiritual vision and power in the Kingdom of God—is the secret of the perfect rose. It is harmony with God's will that gives God's creatures a chance to achieve the end for which God designed them; and this is true of all of God's creatures, whether they are roses or cabbages, stars or men. If the stars are fulfilling their mission better than men, it is because they are harmonizing with law better than men. Everything in creation that a star must have to fulfill its mission is available whenever it needs it. And

God is not partial to stars. If I should this moment begin to harmonize with God's will as completely as a star, all the power and resources of God that I need to become what He wants me to become and to do what He wants me to do would become available for my use. If I should thus become one with God I might ask what I would and it would be done unto me. If God should call me to do as wonderful a thing as Gideon of old did, I should have the courage and power to do it.

The trouble with us is that we want to be exceptions to God's rule. We know that we must harmonize with God's will as roses do and as stars do, but we don't want to be compelled to harmonize in the way they do. We don't want to have to go to God and fall in with His wishes and plans, as they have to do; we want God to come down to us and fall in with our wishes and plans. This is the secret of most of our distressing failures in prayer. This is the secret of our lack of power. This explains why it is that when thirty thousand people volunteer for God's army most of them are glad of a chance to run back home before the fighting begins. Most of us don't go to God to fall in with His wishes and plans; we go to persuade Him to fall in with our wishes and plans.

And yet we say we don't understand how it is. We don't understand why God should turn a deaf ear to our prayers when we have prayed as earnestly as anybody ever did!

II

If I want the power to do the work God has given me to do, I can get it by bringing my whole being in line with His will. This will bring me in touch with the divine sources of supply and with every pore of my being open to receive what He has in store for me. In other words, I shall become one with Him, as the branch is one with the vine, and His life and power will begin to flow through me.

It is all so simple; and yet how many of us are standing before our tasks trembling from sheer weakness. What is the trouble?

There is but one answer. We are self-willed children and we don't want to be one with God; we want Him to be one with us.

It takes a God-reinforced man to win a great victory for God, but this does not mean that if we would win we must "get God on our side," as we so often say; it means that we must get on God's side. That is what Gideon did and that is what all of God's successful warriors and workers have had to do. Perhaps we would not regard Gideon as a very pious man if he were living among us to-day, but in the story we have of him we do not find him guilty of the impiety that has paralyzed so many modern Christians, the impiety of trying to persuade God to make His will and plans conform to man's wishes. If we want God's power we must get in line with Him. Here is the

current of His will running in a straight line by me. All of His resources are connected with this current. As I have said, if I will bring myself in line with God's will as a man would lay a crooked stick against a straight wall and make the stick conform to it—if I will so conform to Him that my mind, my heart, every part of my being will lie close along the line of His will,—then I shall become one with Him and all of His resources to the extent of my needs will be available for my use.

But how can a poor self-willed creature do such a thing? He cannot do it without help. Gideon did not do it without help. Two things had to be done for him. God had to reveal His will to him so that he could see how to get in line with it, and He had to give him such a revelation of Himself that he would want to get in line with it and would be inspired and strengthened to get in line with it. God does these two things for men to-day just as He did them for His heroes in Old Testament days. Not indeed in the same spectacular way, but in a more wonderful way. He has sent His Son not only to show us the Father's will, but to show us the Father Himself. If I will go to the Son, if I will learn the story of His life, if I will linger over His words, if I will seek His face in prayer, if I will give myself to Him as my Saviour and Lord and seek to follow in His footsteps, walking as He walks, serving as He serves, the

Father's will will daily become clearer to me and sooner or later the Father Himself will become so real to me that I will just have to fall on my face before Him. When we become really conscious of God we are simply bound to fall at His feet. And as we fall it is the most natural thing in the world to drop our own wishes and plans. And so long as we remain at His feet we don't think of taking them up again. We only wonder how we managed to hold on to them so long.

How cheap these precious baubles of ours, these wishes and plans of ours, appear when once we become one with God!

VIII

WAS JESUS UNSCIENTIFIC?

I

MATERIALISTIC scientists tell us that they do not regard Christianity seriously because it is unscientific. They are sure it is unscientific because it rests upon belief in the supernatural, which of course is unscientific. And they are sure that belief in the supernatural is unscientific because in their minds supernatural is the same as unnatural or antinatural, which, as everybody knows, is unscientific.

All this, it must be admitted, is very disconcerting and might lead to something serious but for our saving grace of humour, which usually reminds us before we have gone too far that even scientists have been known to make funny mistakes. Even scientists have been known to indulge in illusions, to mistake assumptions for proof, and even to fall into that commonest of blunders current in polite society—the blunder of confusing the opinions which one acquired ready-made at college with the opinions which he actually thought out for himself in maturer years.

Even scientists have been known to imagine that their opinions of religion, for instance, were formed after years of patient research and thought, when as a matter of fact they had not given religion a serious thought since the day they acquired at college the ready-made opinion that Christianity is unscientific and therefore not worthy of a serious thought.

When my learned friend, the professor of biology, prefaces his announcement of an opinion about a matter of science with the statement that it is the result of long years of careful research and thought, I have no difficulty in accepting his assurance as both sincere and truthful; but when he asks his audience to believe that an opinion which he is about to deliver concerning a matter of religion was reached in the same way, I cannot feel sure of anything except his sincerity. His statement may be true as well as sincere, but with my recollection of my college days before me I find it difficult to avoid the suspicion that he acquired his religious opinions as most intelligent unbelievers have acquired theirs—in the Sophomore year and therefore before and not after those impressive long years of careful research and thought. This suspicion, I admit, may not be very charitable, but in view of the frank admission of my unbelieving friend that he has not regarded religion seriously since he was at college, it might be worse.

II

A boy goes to college with a religious faith which he supposes to be the Christian faith, and in the fierce light of the lecture hall and the laboratory soon discovers that it is unscientific. And to a young fellow who has yet to appreciate the wisdom of Davy Crockett's advice to be sure you are right and then go ahead, that is the same as saying that the teachings of Jesus are unscientific. And so the matter is settled then and there. Not once does he pause to ask whether he was sure he was right before he went ahead—whether the faith which he brought to college was really the Christian faith or only a patch-quilt of Christian and pagan ideas which he had been told was the Christian faith.

Undoubtedly many of the religious beliefs which the average boy carries to college are unscientific. Perhaps two-thirds of his ideas of prayer are unscientific. But as these unscientific ideas are all either pagan or misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus, it hardly seems quite fair to point to them as evidences that the teachings of Jesus are unscientific. The truth is, the current notion that Christianity is unscientific did not come from the exposure of the teachings of Jesus to the light of science; it came from the exposure of certain supposed teachings of Jesus to the light of science. The bad repute which the Christian faith has had the misfortune to acquire among materi-

alistic scientists is nothing more than the result of keeping bad company. Unquestionably the pagan ideas with which the Christian faith is associated in the popular mind are unscientific. Nothing, for example, could be more unscientific than the pagan conception of prayer. The pagan goes to God with the idea that God's will can be changed if the worshipper can only find the secret of turning the "trick." He believes that if sufficient inducements are offered, God will drop His purpose and plans and fall in with the supplicant's purpose and plans. He does not know much about God's laws, but that, to his mind, is of no importance: if God can be induced to side with him he will not mind smashing all His laws if they should be in his way.

Nothing could be more unscientific than the idea that the way to get what we need is to induce God to drop His will and plans and come down and fall in with ours. But this is paganism, not Christianity. So far from being Christ's teaching it is exactly the opposite of His teaching. Christ never taught anything that was unscientific. He believed in the supernatural, but He did not believe in the unnatural or anti-natural. On the contrary He was the first great religious teacher to make effective protest against what we would call nowadays the unscientific character of popular religious beliefs.

Other teachers had protested against credulity as

a foundation for religion, but it was left to Jesus to offer a scientific foundation to take its place. He offered faith, which when one comes to think of it, is as thoroughly scientific as credulity is unscientific. Moreover, He was the first teacher to rest particular religious beliefs upon what we would call scientific grounds. There is nothing in the whole range of modern science more scientific than the second ground upon which He rested His doctrine of prayer.

III

When I pray as a pagan—and most of us pray as pagans at one time or another—I want God to drop His will or law and help me to have my way. I try to get Him on my side. The materialist says that this is absurd, and he is right. But when I pray as a Christian I don't want God to drop His will or law. I know that all of God's supplies come through His will or law, and in praying, instead of asking Him to violate His law, I try to get in line with it so that I can make connection with the channel of His supplies and thus get the full benefit of His law. This the materialist seems never to have heard of or he would have to admit that Christian prayer is as scientific as a law of nature. He would have to admit that it is as scientific as the law of prayer which runs through nature.

To repeat in substance what I have said before,

all the supplies which God has prepared for His creatures come through His will or law, and whether we are plants, animals or men they will reach us according to our needs if we are in line with His will or law. If a tree will stay where it belongs, in perfect harmony with law, every cry of need that comes from it down to its very roots will be answered. And the same is true of a man. The trouble with us is that we are forever pulling ourselves away from where we belong, and in breaking away from God's will we break connection with His channels of supply. An uprooted tree may cry for help until it rots and it will not get it unless it gets back into its place and into harmony with law. So a man who has pulled himself away from God's will may cry for help till doomsday and his prayers will not be answered until he goes back to where he belongs. Fortunately God has provided a way for an uprooted man to get back—something He has not done for uprooted trees.

The strange thing about the materialist is that he can see the law of prayer running through the life of a plant or animal, but cannot see it running through the life of a man. There is nothing he believes in more enthusiastically than the law of prayer in nature. He knows that the whole process of evolution rests upon it. When an eyeless animal in the course of its development comes out of the darkness and begins to live in the light, it

must have eyes; it is bound to have eyes, and in response to its unconscious cry of need the eyes come. Nobody knows how they come: it looks as if nature has to violate its laws to make them come; but neither the materialist nor the Christian will hear to such a thing: whatever the appearances, nobody believes that nature violates its laws. Why is it that a materialist can believe that the Creator of the universe has so arranged nature that the unconscious prayer of an eyeless animal for eyes can be answered in accordance with law, and yet cannot believe that a cry of need from a human being can be answered without violating law? Why should God do more for an animal than for a man? Why is it unreasonable to believe that God has so arranged the universe that when a human being falls in line with His will he makes connection with heaven's sources of supply, so that if he ask what he will it shall be done unto him? If I accept God's will as my own, whatever my lips may say, my heart will ask only for what He wants done: why should it be impossible for Him to do what He wants done without violating His own laws?

I do not mean to assert that there is no difference between God's provision for answering men's conscious prayers and His provision for answering the unconscious prayers of animals, but I do insist that it is foolish to say that He can answer the prayers of animals in accordance with law, but cannot answer the prayers of men without violat-

ing law. It is true that we Christians insist that many answers to prayer are supernatural, but that does not mean that they are anti-natural: it only means that many prayers are answered in accordance with laws that are either beyond nature or beyond anything that we know of nature. It is not necessary to assume that in order to answer prayer God must do something contrary to nature; it is only necessary to assume that there are some arrangements in the machinery of the universe which God knows about that we don't.

Let me sum up what I have said in a word. Our pagan ancestors thought that to have their needs supplied they must persuade God to drop His way and fall in with their way. Jesus taught that if men would have their needs supplied they must drop their way and fall in with God's way. The pagan that is in us is always seeking to get God on our side. The Christian that is in us is always trying to get on God's side.

IX

HOW DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

I

THE ancient world was not harassed with perplexing questions about prayer. It did not doubt the ability of God to answer prayer, and apparently it was not concerned to know how He did it. People believed that He could answer their prayers if He felt like it and their only problem was to make Him to feel like it.

In other words they went to God just as they went to their kings. In those simple days kings were despots, and when a subject approached his sovereign his only concern was to win his favour. If he could win his favour he could get what he wished, for a king could do as he pleased. A king was not bound by any law, either of God or man. He was under no obligations. He did not have to recognize anybody's rights; he did not have to keep his promises; he was not even bound by the demands of his own moral nature. A king could do no wrong. If he chose to turn a river out of its course to gratify a favourite subject, he would do it regardless of consequences. If it resulted in

destroying the farms of a thousand other subjects, it was nobody's business but his own.

Praying to a king was a very simple matter in those days and people prayed to God just as they prayed to their king. It never occurred to them that God might not be a despot. Even among the ancient Hebrews He was approached as a despot. They thought of Him as a good, kindly disposed despot, but still a despot. Aside from a few divinely illumined men it never occurred to anybody in those days that God might be a being with obligations; that He might be bound by the demands of His own moral nature; that He might have a will and purpose which would not allow Him to follow a whim or caprice; that He might be under a moral compulsion to keep His promises, to stand for justice and truth, to act according to the dictates of His wisdom and love.

But times have changed. The world has long since ceased to recognize the divine right of kings to do as they please, and it has come to see that even God Himself can do as He pleases only because He pleases to do right. And now that we can no longer approach God as a despot prayer has ceased to be a simple problem. In the simplest of prayers there are many questions involved and in many cases it is a very complex problem. To those who have learned that God does not answer prayer as a despot and have not gone further, it is a hopeless problem. This is one secret of the present

pathetic attitude of so many good men of scientific training: they have learned from science that if there is a God He cannot be a despot—that He cannot answer prayer without regard to the demands of His nature—but they have not gone further and learned from Christ how He does answer prayer.

II

According to the ancient teaching—the pagan teaching—God acts solely according to His pleasure. According to science and human experience this is impossible. Science says that if there is a God He must act according to the demands of His own essential nature and not on whim or impulse. Human experience says the same thing. What did Jesus say? If He had never uttered a word on the subject it would be easy to guess where He stood, for He was always against paganism. But He did utter a word on the subject and He said what science and human experience have said, only He went further. He revealed what God's essential nature was. God is an infinitely good, wise and loving Father, and He answers the prayers of men, not on whim or impulse, as the despots of old answered their subjects, but as we who are fathers would answer our children if we had unlimited power and were infinite in goodness, wisdom and love. God cannot act on impulse, says science, for He is necessarily bound by His own nature. And

to this human experience agrees. God cannot act on impulse, said Jesus, because He is our Father and is bound by the obligations of Fatherhood. If God was a despot we would have little encouragement to pray; but being a Father, says Jesus, there is every reason why we should pray. If He were a despot we could never be sure, when we asked for bread, that He would not give us a stone; He might even take a notion, if we asked for a fish, to give us a serpent; but being a Father, we know that if in ignorance we should ask for a stone He would be likely to give us bread, and that if we asked for a serpent He would not give it to us under any circumstances. Being a Father—not an indulgent parent, but a good, wise and loving Father—He will do for us what a human father would do for his children if he had the heavenly Father's power, goodness, wisdom and love. In other words, He will do that which is best for us, whatever we may ask for.

III

How does a good, wise and loving father answer the requests of his children? Clearly he answers them in accordance with and not regardless of the demands of his character as a good, wise and loving father. A true father does not ignore the demands of his own moral nature. He does not ignore his will as expressed in the laws he has established for the government of his family. He does

not ignore his promises. He does not favour one child at the expense of another. He does not execute justice without regard to mercy and he does not show mercy without regard to justice. In a word he is true to himself.

He is not only true to himself, but he is true to his children. He does not force them to violate the demands of their own moral nature. He does not run roughshod over their wills and consciences. He does not indulge their present pleasures to the hurt of their future interests. He does not indulge their bodies to the hurt of their immortal souls. He does not give them that which will do them harm, no matter how much they may cry for it.

A true father will not give his son that which may do him actual harm under any circumstances. He will not indulge him on the ground that he loves him too well to deny him. If he really loves him he will not hesitate to deny him. Nor will he grant his son's request if he must thereby violate the laws which he has established for the government of his children with a view to their eternal well-being. He may choose to suspend certain minor regulations for a little while for John's benefit. He may even ask Mother to delay dinner for half an hour. But he will not violate any law that is essential to John's eternal well-being. Nor will he favour John at the expense of Mary or any other member of the family. He will not answer

John's request for an apple by giving him Jim's apple, or by giving him the privilege of snatching Jim's apple from him. Nor will he give him the privilege of going to the pantry and getting an apple without Mother's permission. To a true father even a mother has rights which cannot be ignored to gratify John. A true father must be true to John, but he must be as true to the rest of the family. He will not give John the right to run over other people's rights. He will not suspend the demands of fairness and truth for John's benefit, no matter how pressing the exigencies of the case may appear.

IV

But let us go further. Let us imagine that John wants something more valuable than an apple—say it is a motorcycle. Assuming that his father is abundantly able to give his son a motorcycle, how will he answer his request? If he must be true both to himself as a father and to his son he may be compelled to say no. He may see that a motorcycle would very seriously interfere with his plans for John's future. John may have a weak heart. John may be a reckless boy, and riding a motorcycle tends to make a reckless boy more reckless. John may be excessively fond of running about and a motorcycle might make him more excessively fond of running about.

On the other hand, Father may reach the con-

clusion that John is just the sort of boy that should have a motorcycle. In that event what will he do? If he is an indulgent father he may hand him the money at once and bid him go and buy the best motorcycle in town; but if he is a good and wise father several other questions will demand consideration. If he is good he will be just, and if he is wise he will be thoughtful. And he will think of the other children. Will it be fair to the other children? Also he will think of Mother. Will a motorcycle interfere with Mother's home regulations and plans? And having settled these questions he will go back to John. There are other questions as to what is best for John. Should he give John the money outright or should he give him an opportunity to earn it? Or should he give him part of the money and require him to earn the rest? Should he look after the whole matter of buying without John's aid or should he require John to attend to such details as going for catalogues and prices? In other words, should he answer John's prayers as if John were helpless or should he require John to help answer his own prayer to the extent of his ability, means and opportunity? Also should he let him have the motorcycle unconditionally and at once, or should he tell him that he will give it to him at the end of the school term provided he studies hard and gets no bad reports?

Perhaps the father has been giving John an

allowance and perhaps John has been saving his money and now has just enough in bank to pay for a motorcycle. Should the father pay for the motorcycle after he has already given John the means to buy it? If John should say that he was not willing to pay for it with his own money, should his father pay for it? Is it wise for a father who has already provided his boy with sufficient means to answer his prayer for a motorcycle to answer it himself without requiring anything of the boy?

But suppose John has very little money in bank and Father has promised to provide the rest; how will he do it? Plainly he will do it in accordance with the principles and rules of conduct which his character demands. There are various ways of getting money honestly, some of which John does not understand. The money for his motorcycle may come so mysteriously that he may not be able to see how his father could get it except by violating some law of God or man; but that does not affect the matter one way or another. The fact that John cannot understand how his father could provide so much money at once without violating the law is no evidence that the law has been violated: it is simply evidence that the father knows of some ways of getting money of which the son is ignorant.

V

Now let us go back to the teaching of Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus is that God answers our prayers as our Father. If we fathers, imperfect as we are, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him? With this teaching before us let us suppose that we have come to God as loving, obedient children come to an earthly father. We are on good terms with Him and we are on good terms with His other children. We have come to ask for certain things, but being loving, obedient children there is one thing we desire above all things; we desire that the Father shall have His way. We want Him to do what He thinks best. Not for the world would we have Him give us what we want if it should prove to be contrary to His will. If He does not want us to have it we do not want it. And not for the world would we have Him grant our request if it must be done at the expense of our fellow-men. If the rain that we want for our corn will ruin our neighbour's wheat, we do not want it.

In this spirit we have come to the Father and thus far all is well. We have come to Him, let us say, about our bread problems. How will God answer our prayer for bread?

A poor woman comes to me with a pitiful story of hunger. There are half a dozen little children at home and they have had nothing to eat since yesterday. Would I give her a little bread?

I assure her that I will look after her wants at

once and she goes away. I go to the telephone and order my grocer to send her a bag of flour. The flour is sent and an hour later the woman is at my door again.

"What's the trouble now?" I ask.

"Oh, nothing!" she exclaims petulantly, "only I didn't ask for flour, I asked for bread."

What will I do? Will I telephone the baker to send her a dozen loaves? Will I send my cook to her house to make the flour into bread? Hardly. What will I do? What ought I to do?

One will say that this is an impossible case, but it is not. Many a man can recall a similar case from his own experience. Here we are before the Father with our bread problem and in all likelihood before we get through with praying, many of us are going to behave just as foolishly as that woman did. Was it not only yesterday that I caught myself pleading with God for a thing which He had already practically given me by providing me with the means to make it myself?

If a great calamity should overtake me and throw me flat on my back, and I should lie there helpless and alone without a crust of bread in the house, and not a living soul within reach, and if I were trying to live in harmony with God, and if it were worth while to the purpose or plans of God that I should remain in this world a while longer, I might ask God for bread and then fold my hands and close my eyes and wait for it to come. And I

might expect it to come. I might expect it to come regardless of whether I could see any way for it to come in accordance with any known law or not. God does as much for little animals that have come out into the light and are crying for eyes, and it is absurd to say that He has no laws or machinery or plans to meet such an emergency in a human being who is trying to live in harmony with Him. But if I cry to God for bread and I have already received from Him the power to do something—however small it may be—toward helping Him answer my prayer, and I make no use of the power He has given me, I shall cry in vain. God is not going to keep me from starving if I am not willing to coöperate with Him to the extent of the means He has already given me to make the bread I need.

Is this only another way of saying that God helps those who help themselves? No, it is not just that: what I mean is that God helps those who use the help He has already given them to help themselves. God does not answer a request without regard to what He has already done for us, and if we want further help from Him we must honour Him by making the most of the help He has already placed in our hands.

A wise father does not overlap his gifts. If John wants a sled his father may go down-town and buy one for him, or if John is able to make a sled he may provide the necessary tools and ma-

terials, but he will not do both. Not if he is a wise father.

And the heavenly Father is a wise Father.

VI

I have in mind at this moment a man who developed a physical trouble which seriously interfered with his usefulness and threatened to bring his life-work to a premature end. As he was devoting himself wholly to God's service it seemed to him that all he had to do was to go to God and ask Him to remove it. It hardly seemed possible that God could refuse to grant such a request of a faithful servant whose only desire was to go on with the work which God had given him to do. But his prayers brought no answer; on the contrary his trouble grew steadily worse. One day it occurred to him that his pain might be doing him far more good than harm, and that instead of asking God to remove it he should leave the matter to His judgment and will, only asking that it might not be allowed to interfere with the duties which He had laid upon him. If his trouble was doing an important work in the development of his character, God might prefer to let it remain and either reduce the pain to a point where it would not be beyond his strength or else give him such additional strength as he might need to triumph over it. And so, like Paul, he became content for his thorn in the flesh to remain, only asking that God's

grace might be sufficient for him. But this also failed: the pain was not reduced and no more strength was given to bear it than he had before.

At last one day when he was almost ready to give up in despair, the thought came to him that he had not been fair with God. In all those months of suffering he had not so much as lifted a finger to help himself. God had given him many means which he might have used in seeking relief and he had not tried a single one of them. God had prospered him, and he was abundantly able to send for a good doctor, but he had preferred to depend upon heaven to heal him direct; that would glorify God and incidentally be a great saving. Also God had given him a good mind and he might have studied his own case and perhaps learned enough to reduce the pain sufficiently to enable him to resume his work. And he had preferred to use his own mind for other things and depend upon God to do his thinking about this matter for him. Also God had given him a strong will and he might have used it in cutting out of his daily life everything which he had found to be aggravating to his trouble. And he had not given his will a thought, but had gone on indulging his appetite regardless of consequences as he had done before the trouble appeared.

And so he decided to make a trial. He would be fair with God. Instead of dishonouring Him by ignoring the means of relief which He had already

given him, he would honour Him by making the most of them. He would send for a good doctor; he would study his own case; he would courageously cut out all self-indulgence from his life and faithfully obey God's laws of health. And he would trust God implicitly to bless all those means and to supply anything else that might be needed. Thus he would place himself in the position of Paul, who not only received grace sufficient to go on with his work in spite of his infirmity but was enabled to rejoice in his infirmity.

Need I add that from the very day this man began to be fair with God he began to triumph over his pain, and that while the thorn in the flesh has remained he has never lacked for strength to do a well man's work?

VII

In answering our prayers God first makes use of the means He has already placed in our hands. If we are not willing to coöperate with Him so that these means will be available we need not expect Him to offer any further help; but if we bring to His service everything He has already given us and these are not sufficient for our needs, we may be sure that He will be ready to supply all the additional help that will be required.

How will God provide this additional help?

Unquestionably He will do it in accordance with His own will and therefore in accordance with

law, which is but an expression of His will. In most cases He will probably do it in accordance with laws with which we are familiar. If I am praying for bread and am using to the best of my ability all the means God has given me to make bread, it is probable that He will provide for my needs in accordance with what we call natural laws. In other words if I fall in with His natural laws by intelligent and faithful plowing and sowing I shall be very likely to reap by the same laws. But suppose the hail should destroy my wheat, or my barns should burn down; and suppose a fire should sweep away the rest of my property and with it all my credit; and suppose disease should overtake me so that I could no longer work; and suppose there should be a good reason why I should remain a little longer in the world; and suppose I could not remain longer unless God should provide bread within forty-eight hours? How would God provide it? Natural laws could not move fast enough for such an exigency; would God answer my prayer by running roughshod over law?

No: He would answer it in accordance with law. As I have said all law is but an expression of God's will and we may be sure He would not find it necessary to run roughshod over His will. If it should be His will that I should continue to live here a little longer He would send me the bread I need, not in defiance of His will as expressed in law, but in accordance with it. He might not do

it by means of any law or method or power with which I am familiar, but He would do it. And so far as we can see there is no reason why He should not do it by means or forces that are just as natural as any of those with which I was already familiar.

Does this mean that in such an emergency God would perform a miracle? Yes, if by a miracle we mean something that is done, not in violation of law, but in accordance with laws which are beyond our range of vision. So far as we can see there is no reason why God should not provide bread to meet a present exigency in a perfectly natural way, just as He provides bread for the coming winter. I have no right to say that God cannot, without violating law, send a stranger to my door with a loaf of bread to keep me from starving. So far as I know to the contrary He may have so arranged the forces of the universe that it would be just as natural for a stranger to bring a loaf of bread to my door under certain conditions and circumstances as it would be for my land to bring me my winter's supply of wheat under certain conditions and circumstances.

X

ASKING IN HIS NAME

I

IN their enthusiasm for the doctrine of the atonement the old-time preachers often overshot the mark. Often in their zeal to exalt the atoning death of Christ they left the impression that humanity owed everything to the Son, the Father not being interested in the salvation of men except for His Son's sake. The Father was represented as being about to destroy men because of their sins, but seeing that His Son loved them, relented and consented for His sake to listen to their cries and come to their help. He was like a certain rich man (to use a popular illustration of that day) to whom a poor fellow came for help. The rich man was about to turn the beggar away when the poor wretch pulled a soiled note from his pocket and handed it to him. It proved to be from the rich man's son who was far away, and in it the son asked his father to help the poor man for his sake. And when the father read it his heart filled up with tenderness and he gladly gave the beggar all that he asked.

Apparently it was this strange idea which gave rise to the present popular conception of the teaching of Christ about asking in His name. If the

Father is interested in us solely for His Son's sake, then surely all that we have to do is to ask for what we want in the Son's name (which in the popular mind means the same as "for His sake") and it will be done unto us.

This notion that our position before God is that of the beggar who has come to a rich man with a note from the rich man's son has probably done more to weaken the prayer link in our chain of faith than anything else that has been taught in the name of Christ. For generations—nobody knows how long—pious mothers have been telling their children that if they wanted their prayers answered they must be sure to say "For Jesus' sake"; and for as many generations, as a consequence of this teaching, their children on reaching the age of nine or ten, have been subjected to a shock which has weakened and in many cases has almost destroyed their religious faith, leaving them palsied with doubt for the rest of their lives. How many children at that age have said to themselves —and sometimes out loud—

"I am not going to believe in God any more. Mother said if I wanted anything and would say, 'For Jesus' sake' He would give it to me: and I said it and said it and didn't get anything!"

II

To say that God will give us whatever we ask for if we ask for Jesus' sake is as absurd as to

say that He will give us whatever we ask for regardless of circumstances or conditions. Certainly Jesus never intended to create the impression that God is ready to give men everything they may ask for, or everything they ask for if they will only mention His name, which amounts to the same thing. Nobody but an enemy of God could have come into this world and told the people that henceforth God would be subject to their orders, and if they wanted anything all they had to do was to ask for it and say, "For Jesus' sake." Suppose God had given His Son the right to make the world such a promise and had stood by His promise. What would have happened? Suppose a mother should say to her children:

"Children, nothing that I do pleases you, and I am going to stop trying to run this home according to my own judgment. Hereafter you can have your own way. I am not going to leave you to yourselves, but I am going to do everything according to your own wishes. Everything you want you shall have. If Johnny wants the house turned upside down he can have it that way. If Baby Kate wants to play with Father's razor, she can play with it to her heart's content. If William wants to turn his room into a gambling den for his friends, he can do it. Anything you ask for you shall have."

What would happen to that home? What would become of Mother's authority? What would be-

come of Mother? How long would it take the whole family to go to the dogs?

What would happen to that home would happen to the whole world if God should say to all men, "Ask what ye will and say, 'For Jesus' sake,' and it shall be done unto you."

But if Jesus did not promise that, what did He promise? Unquestionably, He promised in a general way that men's prayers should be answered. But what did He mean by prayer? As I have said, He did not mean the cry of a beggar to a stranger. He was not thinking of beggars going to strangers: he was thinking of children going to a father. However unworthy we might be, if we would go to God in the Son's name—if we would go in the Son's spirit, recognizing Him as our Father, submitting ourselves to His will as He did, trusting to His judgment—to His knowledge of what is best for us—and desiring nothing that did not accord with His will, our prayers would be answered.

In other words, according to the teaching of Jesus, there is but one way in which a man can get from God everything he desires, and that is to fall in so completely with the Master that when he goes to the Father he cannot desire anything that does not harmonize with the Father's will. That was what He meant when He said, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

And that is what He meant when He said: "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it." If I will become completely united with Him, as a branch is united with the vine, so that His spirit and His will shall have free course through me, as the sap of the vine has free course through the branch, then when I go to the Father I will go in the Master's spirit and with the Master's desires; and having His spirit and desires I will represent Him; I will pray in His name or in His stead. Thus if I ask anything in His name (not with my blundering lips, which often ask for foolish things, but with my heart, which will desire only what He desires), it shall be done unto me.

Is this unreasonable? Then science is unreasonable, for this teaching is nothing more nor less than the scientific teaching that all supplies come through harmony with law. According to science if I could bring every part of my physical being into perfect harmony with law, every part would be in vital touch with the sources of supply, and my physical needs would be as perfectly supplied as they would be if I were a star revolving in its sphere in perfect harmony with law. According to Jesus, if I will go to the Father in His name—if I will become one with the Son, as the branch is one with the vine, so that when I go to the Father I shall represent the Son's spirit and will, desiring only that which the Son would desire—in a word, if I will go to the Father in such harmony with

the Son that I can speak for Him, I shall be in harmony with the will of the Father, and therefore, of His law; and being in harmony with His law I shall be in vital communication with the Supreme Source of Supply.

III

The scientific truth upon which this teaching of Jesus rests not only runs through nature, but it runs through human experience. Let us take a case from every-day life. Here—let us say—is my friend Jones. Jones and I grew up together. We were chums almost from infancy. We had the same point of view, the same ideals, the same sympathies, and we grew up to think alike and feel alike. It was as if we were two branches of the same vine.

Jones and I are stockholders in the same business concerns, and when he is unable to attend a stockholders' meeting he always asks me to represent him. But he never tells me what to do. Usually when I remind him that certain things will come up he says: "Well, you and I always agree, so just act on your own good judgment and it will be satisfactory to me."

Jones's father lives in Philadelphia. I have a business proposition which I am unable to handle alone and I am going to Philadelphia for help. Jones and I have talked the matter over and as usual he is in perfect sympathy with my wishes

and plans. Jones is one of those fortunate fellows whose fathers were their best chums in boyhood and he and his father are still in perfect sympathy with each other. He never wants anything that is not in harmony with his father's wishes, and when he wants help about a matter with which both he and his father are perfectly familiar he simply asks for it. And he gets it. If it is a matter with which he is not as familiar as his father, he says to him:

"You understand the situation better than I do and I leave the matter in your hands. Remember, I don't want anything that is not in full accord with your wishes and plans."

And so when I am about to leave for Philadelphia Jones comes over and says to me:

"You know how I feel. I want you to have the help you need and Father can help you, and I want you to go to him in my name. Just go as if you were me, or as if you were representing me. You and I have the same spirit and wishes and he and I have the same spirit and wishes, and if you will just let him know that your wishes are mine, all of us being in perfect agreement about the matter, you will get what you ask for."

Do I mean to say that this is all that is meant by asking in Jesus' name? No; but I do mean to say that it does not mean less than this.

One thing more. Sometimes when we tell God that we are asking "for Jesus' sake" or "in Jesus'

name" our words fall back upon us as if they had struck a heaven of brass. What is the trouble? I am reminded of another case in every-day life. It is the case of—well, let us call him Joe Brown. Joe is Jones's nephew. He is a selfish young fellow who has never learned the meaning of harmony. He has always looked out for number one and never harmonizes with anybody. As for Jones he was never known to agree with him about anything. But Joe is in trouble and he goes to Philadelphia to see Jones's father.

"Mr. Jones," says Joe, "your son and I are near neighbours and close friends. We are always together and what I want he wants. And he told me that I could come to you in his name and say to you that he would be glad if you would give me the help I need."

But the old man, instead of handing the youth what he asks for, only gives him a searching gaze and turns away.

The trouble with many who think they are asking in Jesus' name is that they are not representing Jesus. They are misrepresenting Him.

XI

THE MASTER'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO WOULD PRAY

I

WHEN Jesus came religion among the Jews was like an orange with all the juice sucked out. All the sweetness was gone and nothing was left but a tasteless form. It was not an irreligious age; no people ever made more of their religion than the Jews of the Master's day; but such a religion! Wherever He went He was oppressed by the sight of men carrying their religion as a heavy burden. It was just a vast mass of burdensome forms. Even prayer, which should have been as natural and easy as breathing, had lost its meaning and degenerated to a mere lifting of dead weights. Men said their prayers as a painful task with the hope of being rewarded for their pains. Even the rabbis could see nothing in it but so much labour for which they desired a reward either from God or man. And from the number of rabbis that were to be seen saying their prayers on the street corners, it was evident that the desire for reward from men

played no insignificant part in the worship of the day.

The sight of those street-corner worshippers made a deep impression upon the Master and it is not strange that in His Sermon on the Mount He should have begun His instructions about prayer by warning His hearers against their example. Those men, Jesus declared plainly, were not really praying: they were simply making a show of piety for gain; they wanted the name of being pious. When a man really wants to pray he has no desire to advertise the fact. He is not thinking of the public eye or ear; he is thinking of the Father and he does not seek a place to pray where men can see how pious he is: he prefers to be alone with the Father. It is easy to "say prayers" on a street corner, but hard to pray; therefore, says Jesus, "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet"; shut out the world and shut yourself in with the Father that you may give your undivided mind and heart to Him. This, of course, does not mean that we should not pray where we would be seen (as in church), but that we should not pray to be seen.

But hypocrisy was not the only thing in the prayers of the rabbis that Jesus abhorred. Their heathenish ideas of prayer were equally repugnant to Him. The way those men rattled off their prayers, repeating them over and over without a thought of what they were saying, was horrifying to His sensitive spirit. How could men thus trifle

with His Father! How could they imagine that they could move the Father by such puerile methods as the heathen used to move their gods! As if the Father was not concerned about their requests but only about the number of times they repeated them!

Of course Jesus did not object to repetition. What disturbed Him was their "vain repetitions." No doubt He would have them repeat their petitions so long as repeating showed earnestness or tended to beget earnestness: the thing that grated upon Him was the mechanical rattling off of prayers which men engaged in with the idea that God watched their lips rather than their hearts and would measure His answer to each petition by the number of times it was repeated.

II

After warning His hearers against the foolish misconceptions of prayer so common in His day, Jesus gave them a model prayer to use when they chose, and after which they might model prayers for themselves. In this prayer He teaches us that we might approach God as a child approaches his father; that God is our Father; that God is the Father of our fellow-men as well as of ourselves; that we are to go to Him as one of His children and not as His only child; that all men are children of the same Father, and therefore all men are

brethren. And when we go to Him we should be concerned most of all about the Father's interests and the Father's glory. First of all, we should pray that His name may be hallowed, that He may be held in reverence by all men, that His will may be perfectly done here on earth even as it is done in heaven.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about this prayer is that it entirely reverses the usual order. Where Christ is not known a man goes to God thinking only of his own wants and will. It never occurs to him that God has any interests and that as a child of God he should think of God's interests, too. But according to this model prayer a man, whatever his needs, should go to God concerned most of all for God's interests. The fact is, we are not in a condition to talk with God about our personal needs until we realize that we are a part of His kingdom and can ask Him not so much to help us as to help His own.

When we realize this and come to speak of our personal needs we shall be content to ask Him to supply our immediate wants. As for our future wants, we need not be concerned about them, for the reason that we have constant access to Him, and we know that He will not change, and that His storehouse will not fail; and besides, we shall want to go to Him every day anyhow. And we shall ask Him to supply our needs—not to satisfy our desires, seeing that what we desire is very apt

to be what we do not need. We shall ask for bread, and we shall not insist on its being buttered. If we are thinking of our own interests and not of His, we shall be more likely to ask for cigars than bread, and we shall be sure to insist on His giving us the portion which belongeth to us in a lump. Then we will go off and play the prodigal and never come back until we have come to husks.

In praying for bread we must remember that it is not bread for the body alone that we need, but bread for the soul also. Moreover in praying for bread for the body it would be well to remember that it is bread we are to ask for, not cake. That was what God gave the Hebrews in the wilderness—bread and not cake; that is, He provided for their necessities: He did not indulge them in luxuries. In other words He treated them as men, not as babies. He had no idea of indulging them. He had undertaken to carry them across the desert, and He would provide the means. He would not pamper them; He would give them what they needed.

One reason why there is so little of the spirit of praise and gratitude in our hearts is that we look to God for cake rather than bread. We desire the sweetmeats of life. We go to Him with our selfish wishes, asking not for the things that we need, but for the things we desire; and because we do not get these things we are not grateful for the plain bread that comes to us. Many of us are like pee-

vish children who dash the bread from the mother's hand because it is not cake, or because it is not sugar-coated. Is it any wonder that we are always saying that so many of our prayers are not answered? God is concerned about our little needs, but it is a mistake to think of Him as an indulgent father who is willing to spoil us by giving us the things that are hurtful simply because He would not deny us. He wants us to be happy to-day, but He is planning for our happiness in the future; and He is not going to provide for to-day's pleasure at the expense of future happiness. It may be well to ask Him to deliver us from a present headache, but after all is it not time for us to play the man, and if God does not choose to remove the headache, can't we bear it like men and not fret and fume around Him like petulant children?

III

After giving them His model prayer Jesus went on to show that God measures our prayers not by what He hears from our lips, but from what He sees in our hearts. If, for instance, we ask God to forgive us our trespasses, however true to form our petition may be, the answer will depend upon how we feel deep down in our hearts toward those who have trespassed against us. If we from our hearts forgive those who trespass against us, God will forgive us; if we do not, God will not forgive

us, no matter how often or earnestly or trustfully we may pray.

This does not mean that the answer to prayer is an arbitrary matter with God; it means that it is not an arbitrary matter with God. The rule to forgive only those who forgive others was not established by arbitrary legislation: it grew out of our relationship with God as our Father. A father does not arbitrarily refuse to forgive his son who has refused to forgive his brother: he refuses because his obligations as a father require it. John disobeyed his father and an hour afterwards went to "make up" with him. But just as he entered the door his father heard him say to Joe: "No; I'll never forgive you as long as I live." What would you have done if you had been in that father's place? If John wanted you to receive him with open arms, but would not recognize your other son as his brother, would you receive him? Can a true father open his arms to a child who refuses to go to his bosom along with his brother?

Other instructions relating to the spirit in which men should pray were given by the Master from time to time. If we would have God treat us as His children we must go to Him in the trustful spirit with which loving, obedient children go to an earthly father. When I was a child I learned that there were certain things which my father was always ready to give me the moment I asked for them. And so when I went to him I did not

go saying in my heart that he could give it to me if he wished and that I hoped he wouldn't put me off. I went with absolute confidence that the moment I asked for it I should get it. But there were many other things about which I had never heard him express his wishes, and when I went to him about those things I was not sure that I should get them. Nevertheless, while I doubted whether my father would give them to me I did not for one moment doubt my father. I always went to him believing in him. I might doubt what he would do in a particular case, but I never doubted his love or his ability to do what his love and wisdom might prompt him to do. I never doubted that he would give me what I asked for if it was best that I should have it.

It is in this trustful spirit of a child, Jesus tells us, that we should go to the Father. If we go to Him for something which we know He is ready to give us the moment we ask it—something that is essential to our eternal welfare—we should not go believing that He will give it to us if it is His will, or that He may give it to us at some future time, but we should go believing that the moment we open our hearts to Him we shall receive our desire. If we ask for such things as forgiveness, cleansing, strength to overcome temptation, we should ask believing, not that we shall receive them at some future time, but that we do receive them.

But there are many things concerning which we

do not know the Father's mind. Must we ask for these things believing that we "do receive them"? No; that is impossible. God does not ask us to be credulous, He asks us to believe; and we can believe only on His word or on evidence. In such cases we cannot pray believing that God will give us what we ask for, for we have no word or evidence on the subject; but we have His word and we have abundant evidence that He is our Father —an infinitely powerful, good, wise and loving Father—and we can pray believing in Him as our Father and therefore believing that if He sees that the thing we ask for is best for us He will give it to us.

And that after all is the greater faith. It is a small matter that John should come to me believing that I will give him a new pair of shoes. He does not have to believe in me in order to believe that. Indeed he may say to himself that he does not believe in me, but he is sure I will give him the shoes because if I don't people will talk about me. As John's father I don't care whether he believes that I will give him the shoes or not, but I do demand that he shall believe in me and therefore shall believe that if I feel that he should have the shoes I shall give them to him.

IV

Faith and earnestness are always found together and are always found encouraging each other.

The more faith we have the more earnestly we pray, and as our earnestness increases our faith grows stronger. This apparently is the secret of the emphasis which Jesus laid upon the importance of great earnestness in prayer. Strangely enough this has been taken by many good people to mean that if we will only be importunate enough we can force God to answer us; that we can worry Him into answering us as the importunate widow worried the unjust judge into answering her. But this is a purely pagan idea and nothing was further from the Master's thought than pagan ideas. In urging us to be importunate Jesus did not mean to teach us that God was like that unjust judge—that He had his mind on other matters and was not interested in us and that we must do something to stir Him up and force Him to pay attention to us. What He had in mind was not the Father's indifference, but ours; not the necessity of stirring Him up but the necessity of stirring up ourselves.

In other instructions Jesus laid emphasis upon humility in prayer, upon the importance of perfect agreement in spirit and purpose when we pray together, and—as I have already pointed out—the importance of making our requests of the Father in the name of the Son. In urging agreement in united prayer Jesus gave a special promise, the full significance of which has never been determined. It is certain, however, that He did not mean what He is popularly supposed to have meant. When

He assured His followers that if two of them would go to God in perfect agreement, God would answer their petitions, and that if even two or three of them would gather together in His name to pray He would be in the midst of them, He did not mean to teach that the problem of reaching and moving the heart of God in a particular case depends upon the amount of pressure that is brought to bear upon Him. He did not mean to say that if I fail to secure God's attention I should get two or three good people to pray with me. God is not man. If we wish to get the ear of the President of the United States we may find it necessary to send a very large and impressive committee to him, but God is different. It is easy to conceive of the Father passing by the largest and most impressive committee ever gathered together and stopping to listen to the plea of a poor little ragged boy whose big, upturned eyes are beaming with confidence and love.

Possibly Jesus was thinking of the wonderful help which harmony among men has always proved to be in bringing about harmony with God. When we fall into harmony with God nothing is easier than to fall into harmony with His children: usually indeed we find that the act of falling in with Him has brought us into harmony with them. And while the converse is not altogether true, it is unquestionably true that when we come into harmony with our fellow-men, some of the most seri-

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ous obstacles which are between us and God disappear. If two men agree together concerning something which they desire of the Father—if their common desire has drawn them together not only in mind but in spirit, so that they have come into perfect harmony with each other—in a word, if they are ready to go to God as one—they have taken a long step toward getting into harmony with God, and they are not likely to go to Him in vain. When I see two brothers going to their father with their arms around each other, I somehow feel quite sure that they will not return empty-handed.

XII

PRAYERS GOD WILL NOT ANSWER

I

PERHAPS nothing that has been taught about prayer has been more widely accepted than the strange doctrine so persistently attributed to Jesus, that the answer to prayer depends wholly upon the size of the supplicant's faith. This strange notion apparently owes its popularity partly to our inherited tendency to believe in magic, and partly to our acquired tendency to interpret the sayings of Jesus apart from their connection and without regard to the general tenor of His teachings. We have never outgrown our pagan habit of attributing the power that belongs to God to something other than God. We no longer believe in magic wands of a material sort, but multitudes of good people believe in the power of faith just as their ancestors believed in the power of a magic wand. And as everybody knows we are still holding on desperately to our convenient habit of taking the words of Jesus to mean what they say on their face without going to the trouble to examine them in connection with their surroundings or with His teachings as a whole. It is so much easier to say, "Did not Jesus assure us

that according to our faith it would be unto us?" and let the matter drop with that.

Of course the absurdity of the idea that the answer to one's prayers depends wholly upon the magnitude of one's faith lies in the fact that it gives to faith the place which belongs exclusively to God. If it means anything at all it means that God has surrendered the control of the universe to those of His children whose faith is sufficiently powerful to run it, and has placed Himself at their disposal to do anything that they may want done. Which of course is unthinkable. If God should suddenly become an indulgent father and should say to us that henceforth He would hold Himself in readiness to do any and everything we might want done, the whole universe would go to pieces before sunset.

Plainly then we have no right to say that God will do for us everything that we ask, provided we ask in faith. If God is a true Father He is not going to turn over the "Father's house" (of which this world is one room) or any part of it to the absolute control of His children. And if He is going to continue in charge He is not going to do everything they may ask Him to do. Some prayers He will answer if they are asked in faith and in accordance with the other conditions which He requires, but other prayers He will not answer, no matter what conditions we may fulfill. Being our Father He will no more give us everything we

ask for than we who are fathers will give to our children everything they may ask for. The fact that little Mary comes to you with perfect faith may stir your heart to its depths, but it is not going to stir you up to the point of giving her the pretty little snake she has just seen on the lawn and for which she is begging in her eloquent baby way.

II

When an Occidental scientist makes a general statement that may possibly be misunderstood he usually pauses to point out the conditions modifying it and to note important exceptions to it. When an Oriental philosopher states a general truth to Oriental hearers he does not usually find it necessary to point out such conditions or exceptions: his hearers are not accustomed to scientific statements that are complete in themselves and they will interpret his words by his other teachings and the general tenor of his teachings. A scientist would never say to a modern American audience, "Ask and ye shall receive," or, "Whatsoever things ye ask, believe that ye do receive them and ye shall have them," without stopping to explain what he meant; but Jesus could utter such sayings to His Oriental hearers and leave them to reason out the matter for themselves, as they were in the habit of doing. An Oriental audience would assume that what He meant was to be found beneath the surface, and His more thoughtful hearers, at

least, would sooner or later arrive at the conclusion that they must look for the modifying conditions in other teachings which had come or might yet come from His lips. And by and by they would probably decide that what the Master meant was that if men would pray to God as their Father they would not pray in vain; that God answers the prayers of men as a good, wise and loving father answers the prayers of his loving, obedient children; that while He will not give them everything they may ask for He will nevertheless answer them as a Father; that if they will ask as loving, obedient children, living in perfect harmony with Him, they will receive that which will satisfy them, for whatever their blundering lips may ask for they will really desire only what the Father desires to give them.

III

Because God is our Father there are some prayers which we may be sure He will answer; but by the same token there are other prayers which we may be just as sure He will not answer.

As I have said, in answering our prayers the Father must be true to Himself, true to us and true to His other children. If He is true to Himself—to the demands of His own moral nature—He must be true to the demands of His kingdom; therefore He cannot, in order to gratify us, do that which would be contrary to such demands or that

which would injuriously affect His kingdom's interests. No matter how earnestly or with how much faith we may pray, He is not going to imperil the future of His kingdom. And that means of course that He is not going to imperil the future of its citizens. He is not going to indulge His children in a present pleasure at the peril of their future happiness. He will not give us that which we ask with selfish desire, for the simple reason that He will not do anything that may encourage selfishness and thereby imperil our souls. He will not even give us that which we ask unselfishly if He sees that it may tend to make us selfish. If I ask for money with the sincere intention of using it as He would have me use it, He is not going to help me to make it if He sees that I would be likely to change my mind and use it for my selfish interests. If I ask to be relieved from all pain so that I may not be handicapped in the work He has given me, He is not going to take the pain away if He sees that it is doing more good than harm. I may expect Him either to give me additional strength or reduce the pain so that I can go on with my work, but I must not expect Him to take the pain away.

If God must be true to Himself He must be true to His laws, which express His will. He may answer our prayers through the operation of laws with which we are familiar (which we call natural laws), or He may answer them through the opera-

tion of laws which are beyond nature (and which we therefore call supernatural laws), but He will not run roughshod over any of His laws, natural or supernatural. To illustrate, there is a law that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. If I have sown thorns I shall reap thorns and all the praying I can do will not move God to put wheat in their place. I may look to Him to forgive me for sowing thorns, but I must not expect Him to save me from the consequences of such sowing. That law is as necessary to the spiritual world as it is to the material world, and if God should set it aside in answer to our prayers and men should find out that they could escape the consequences of their evil acts by running to Him, they would plunge headlong into sin and the world would soon become a maelstrom of evil.

If God must be true to us He cannot imperil our souls by giving us an easy time. An easy time means flabby muscles; it means that instead of developing toward manhood we are dropping back toward babyhood. The idea that God in His goodness gives some people an easy time was hoary with age in the days of Job, and it still shows no sign of decay. Even in this materialistic age, which has always shown an obstinate persistence in attributing to nature nearly everything that was formerly attributed to God—even in this age nothing is more common than to hear Smith say how good God was to Jones in giving him such an easy

time. But God gives no man an easy time. Some men take it—take it by shirking the duties of life—but that is another matter.

And of course God is not going to answer our prayers in a way that would encourage us to take an easy time. He is not going to answer my prayer for healing if I dishonour Him by lazily neglecting to use the means He has already given me for its cure. If I have a note due to-morrow and go off on a picnic, trusting God to answer my prayer for the money by the time I get back, I shall not find a check to cover it in to-morrow's mail. I shall only find a notice that my note has gone to protest. And when I go to God about it I shall find that I have discredited myself with Him as well as the bank. If I want my bank to honour my requests I must honour its rules, and if I want God to honour my requests I must honour His rules. And one of God's rules is that if I want His help in an emergency, instead of going off on a picnic, I must stay at my post of duty and make full use of the means He has already put in my hands to help myself.

If God will not give us an easy time it is clear that He will not encourage us in self-indulgence of any sort and therefore He will not answer our prayers for luxuries. God designed us for manhood in His kingdom—high, heroic manhood—and He is not going to undertake to develop His children to heroic manhood in the lap of luxury.

Heroes are not developed in that way. It is not strange that when God sent His Son to grow up in the world He chose for Him the home of a carpenter. And if He did not choose luxurious surroundings for His Son there is no reason why we should expect Him to choose luxurious surroundings for us. He wants us to become men, not the soft, spineless weaklings one so often sees in homes where children are coddled in padded kiddy-coops, instead of being taught to endure hardness as brave little soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The pious sentiment so often heard to the effect that God in His goodness gave old Moneybags a lap of luxury to lie in, is a serious reflection upon Divine Providence. God gives no man a lap of luxury to lie in. He gives men power to make money for use in His service and the cause of humanity, and when a man uses the money he has made in fitting out a lap of luxury, to the neglect of God and humanity, he is guilty of misappropriating a trust fund, and it does not advance the glory of God or the cause of truth to say that God did it.

IV

If the Fatherhood of God requires Him to be true to us it requires Him to be true to the rest of His children. It would be a strange father who would help one son at the expense of another. Piety does not save us from doing foolish things

and many prayers of pious people have gone unanswered because they were so thoughtless as to ask God what they desired without stopping to inquire what effect His answer might have upon their neighbours. A little band of faithful Christians gather together daily in their mountain cove to pray for rain. The rain does not come, and by and by unbelievers begin to scoff and the faithful grow discouraged and begin to ask one another why God should dishonour their faith and make them the laughing-stock of their wicked neighbours. It never occurs to them that if God should send them the great downpour they have been praying for, it would ruin the crops of hundreds of His children down in the valley, whose wheat was just ready for the reaper. God does not dishonour our faith in Him, but we might as well understand that He is not going to send the rain we are praying for to save our corn if we don't care a fig what becomes of our neighbour's wheat.

God will not answer our prayers at our neighbour's expense. He will not rob Peter to pay Paul. The farmer who thanked God for answering his prayers for rain that saved his crop but destroyed the crops of a hundred good men far down the valley, was labouring under a misapprehension. Instead of crediting God with a good deed he attributed to Him a deed which any honest man would have been ashamed of. God did not send that rain in answer to his selfish prayer; it came

in accordance with certain laws—God's laws, it is true, but laws which were established, not to gratify one farmer's selfish desires, but for the benefit of the race as a whole.

But this is not all. God will not answer a prayer that will require Him to violate a human being's moral nature. He made us moral beings with the power to choose between good and evil—and He will not do anything in violation of the nature He has given us. Having given John the power to choose between good and evil, He cannot, in answer to our prayers, take this power out of John's hands and force him to be good. If John is going to the dogs we may pray to God to save him, but we need not expect God to take him by force and make him a good boy. We may look to Him to help us bring John to his senses, to make him see the error of his way more clearly, to surround him with gracious influences that will help a boy to turn from the downward path if he has the slightest desire to turn, but He cannot step in and take away John's power to choose, and choose for him.

God cannot force us to turn from evil and choose good. I am aware that many good people like to point to Paul's conversion as an exception. But Paul's conversion was not an exception. Christ did not convert Paul against his will. He shed a vast flood of light upon him and gave him a wonderful vision that brought him to his senses

and made him see the folly of his course, but He did not overpower him and turn him round: He simply opened his eyes to his situation and let him choose for himself. And in spite of the fact that Christ had already chosen him, Paul chose for himself. He no more destroyed Paul's power to choose for himself by choosing him first, than a man destroys the power of the woman he would marry to choose for herself by choosing her first.

V

Will God have anything to do with prayer tests? Will He answer a prayer that is offered just to see if He will answer it? If a Christian should accept a challenge from unbelievers to prove that God answers prayer and should publicly pray for rain, would God be under obligations to send rain?

No. And for at least two reasons. In the first place, no one could really pray under such circumstances. One might beg but one could not pray. However sincere one might be, one could not approach such a test in the spirit of prayer. Instead of approaching God as a loving, obedient child approaches a father, he would go to Him as a man who had made a wager on God and was depending upon Him to help him win. He would go saying in his heart: "These people don't believe that you can answer prayer and I have risked everything on proving that you can. So stand by me, and when I pray for rain send a downpour."

If prayer is an effort to place ourselves at God's disposal, how can we pray when we have placed ourselves in a position which demands that God shall place Himself at our disposal?

In the second place, if it were possible to really pray under such circumstances it would be foolish to expect God to set aside His will and look to us for orders. Even a human father would not do that. My father did it for me in childish play, but it was only when I was too young to know that a child cannot give his father orders. If when I was older I had gone to him and told him that I had made a bet that he would give me anything I might ask for, and that he must place himself at my command and be ready to answer when I call —if I had gone to him in that spirit he might have given me something, but not what I asked for. More likely it would have been a whipping.

Of course somebody is thinking of Elijah. If it was right for Elijah to propose a prayer test why should it be wrong for us? To this I answer, first, that Elijah did not propose a prayer test. The question before the people was not whether they should pray or not, but whether they should serve God or Baal, and Elijah's proposal was a test to decide between the two. In the second place, even admitting for the sake of the argument that it was a prayer test, it does not follow that God would take part in a prayer test to-day unless we should go to Him in Elijah's spirit and

in an emergency of equal significance. If some terrible moral cataclysm should overtake the race and the worship of the true God was in danger of being blotted out of the world, and a man of Elijah's faith and spirit should go to God for help, it is possible that God would consent to take part in a test designed to rally the dying faith of humanity. But what resemblance can one see between this hypothetical case and such prayer tests as have been proposed in modern times by unbelievers who have never so much as pretended to care whether humanity's faith was dying or not?

Of all the puerile ideas that have accumulated around the subject of prayer none is more absurd than this idea of settling the question of prayer by a test. If I wish to know whether my father really loves me, do I take him to some expert chemist and have him subjected to a chemical test for love? That would be an impossible test. If I want to know whether my father is influenced by the pleadings of his children, do I take him to a mathematician and subject him to a mathematical test? Five times a day my father does what his children ask him to do; twenty-five times a day he refuses to do what they ask him to do. Four times out of five, the mathematician tells me, my father refuses to do what his children want him to do. Does this settle the question? Does it prove that my father is or is not influenced by the prayers of his children? And as a mathematical test is im-

possible in settling the question whether my father on earth is influenced by his children's pleadings, is it not just as impossible as a test in settling the question whether my Father in heaven is influenced by the pleadings of His children on earth? The question of prayer is a question of love, and you cannot settle a question of love by mathematics any more than you can analyze a mother's heart in a chemist's laboratory.

VI

It would hardly seem necessary to add that God will not answer the prayers of an impenitent man. He will not answer the prayers of a man who is not sorry for his sins, whether he is a criminal or only a proud, self-satisfied Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as other men. I do not mean to say that God will not come to the help of the impenitent: He is still sending His sunshine and rain upon the unjust as well as upon the just: but I do mean to say that He will not come to the help of an impenitent man in answer to his prayers. So long as God is our Father we have no right to expect Him to answer the prayers of a man who is so entirely out of harmony with Him that he does not care to get into harmony with Him. If your son John should fall out of harmony with you and should not care to have anything to do with you, and should send Robert to you to ask for what he wanted, he would send in vain—unless

you were a very foolish and indulgent father. A wise father will answer his son, but he will not answer an ex-son. He will not answer a boy who has despised his sonship and broken away from it and who refuses to recognize his father as anything more than a possible source of supply. I do not say that he will do nothing for him: he will do something for him, but he will not answer his prayers. There is but one answer you will send to John and that is that if he wants anything from you he must come to you for it. Which of course means that the ugly breach between you must be closed up; that he must recognize you as his father and come back into harmony with you as your son. Under no other conditions can you safely give him what he wants. If you should honour his request through Robert you would dishonour your own fatherhood, weaken your authority and influence as a father, confirm John in his unnatural and perilous course, and encourage a situation which would utterly demoralize and eventually destroy your home.

So it would be in the Father's House (of which, as I have said, this world is one room) if God should lay aside His infinite goodness, wisdom and love, and as an indulgent father answer the requests that come to Him from unnatural children who are so far out of harmony with Him that they don't care to have anything to do with Him as their Father and will not recognize Him except as a possible source of supply.

XIII

PRAYERS GOD WILL ANSWER

I

BECAUSE God must be true to Himself, true to us and true to the rest of His children, there are some prayers which He will not and cannot answer. But by the same token there are other prayers which He will and must answer.

God must make such answers to the petitions of His children as are demanded by His own nature and by His own will and plans for His kingdom and for His children. The infinite goodness of God necessarily makes Him the friend of all good and the enemy of all evil. He cannot ignore any sincere call that may be made upon Him to come to the help of one who is struggling to overcome sin. If therefore I have definitely taken my stand with Him and am sincerely praying for that which will help me to overcome sin, I may be sure that my petition is in harmony with His will and therefore will be granted. If I want my sins forgiven, if I want a pure heart, if I want light upon my pathway that I may walk according to His will,

if I want strength to go forward—to overcome the obstacles that evil has placed in my way, to achieve my high destiny as a son of God—I do not have to submit the matter to His judgment or will: the question has been forever settled by the demands of His nature. If the Father is infinitely good it is bound to be His will that we should have that which would help us to triumph over evil. We do not honour God when we ask Him to forgive our sins if it is His will; rather we dishonour Him. It is as if a child in peril of his life should cry to his father to come to his help and should add: "That is, if you really want to help me."

The fact that God is our Father insures an answer to many prayers that are made in the spirit of a loving, obedient child. It is not an open question with me whether I shall provide for my children's needs: as a father I may not provide for what they imagine to be their needs, but I cannot refuse to provide for what I know to be their needs. So if I go to God as my Father I may be sure that whatever I may ask for—if my heart is right with His heart—if I speak to Him as a loving, obedient child—He will treat me as a loving and wise father treats a loving and obedient child: He will give me that which is best for me.

This does not mean that God will always help me in the same way that I help my children. If my child is in physical peril I must rescue him. It is one of my duties as a physical father to look

after the physical welfare of my children. But the heavenly Father is looking after the welfare of our spirits—our essential, immortal selves—and while He cares for our bodies it is for the sake of our spirits, and therefore He will not hesitate to sacrifice our bodies for our spirits. If it is necessary for the development of my spiritual manhood that I should suffer, God is not going to shield me from suffering. If it is best for my eternal welfare that I should give up this present physical life—if for instance I should to-day find myself at a point where I must deny Christ or die—God is not going to shield me from death. He did not deny the privilege of martyrdom to the saints of old: why should He deny me?

II

In answering the requests of his children a father is governed not only by the demands of his moral character but by the interests of his home and the welfare of his children, both individually and collectively. So in answering our prayers God is governed not only by the demands of His nature but by the interests of His kingdom and the welfare of His children, both individually and collectively. If this is true then we may be sure that when we are sincerely and unselfishly seeking the interests of God's kingdom we are in harmony with His will and that He will not ignore our requests. If our hearts are set upon the spread of

God's kingdom in our community, He will answer our prayers just as far as He can without violating the moral nature of the people of the community. He cannot force people to be good, but He can and will set to work influences which will help men to open their eyes to the truth. We need not ask Him to spread the Gospel in our community without our aid, but we may ask Him to use us in spreading it.

I have said that God will not answer our prayers for luxuries, for the reason that He has set His heart upon developing us to the highest manhood. But for this same reason we may confidently expect God to answer our prayers for the necessaries of life. So far as we can see God made this world for humanity's gymnasium or training school. We are here to be developed to manhood—to spiritual manhood, the manhood of the sons of God. It is foolish to imagine that God would defeat His purpose by indulging us in luxuries, but it is not less foolish to imagine that He would defeat His purpose by refusing to provide for our necessities. So long as it is important that we should remain in the present life, and we are living in harmony with His will, we may confidently expect Him to answer our prayers for the necessaries of life. Not for what a luxury-loving age has learned to regard as the necessaries of life. Naturally there must be a considerable difference between God's views on this point and the view of an age that

insists upon including pleasure automobiles and evening gowns in its budgets of necessary expenses.

Again, if we are devoting ourselves wholly to God—if we are doing for His kingdom and for our fellow-men what He wants us to do, we may expect Him to answer our prayers for the help we need in our work. This does not mean that He will fall in with our plans and help us according to our own ideas: He may choose to overturn our plans and help us in ways that do not appeal to our judgment; but He will help us. It is inconceivable that the Father should fail His children in their extremity. It is inconceivable that He should leave us to make bricks without straw, to work in the dark where light is necessary, to go on day after day without food or water, to lift a log alone when we are only strong enough to lift one end of it. Nevertheless it must not be forgotten that the most eloquent prayer for help to lift a log comes from the man who is struggling to lift his own end, and not from the man who refuses to take off his coat until he can see help coming.

All this of course is but another way of saying that God will give His children everything that we who are fathers would give our children if we were as powerful and wise and good and loving as He. I am trying to give my children good gifts. If I had the Father's power I would go further. I would give them the best gifts. . . .

There are other prayers which God will answer, but they are all embraced under the general rule which I have tried to illustrate. God will answer every prayer that He can answer as our Father—as an infinitely powerful, good, wise and loving Father. If we are uncertain about a particular petition we have only to lay it by the side of this rule. Take for example our prayer for rain. Will God answer our prayers for rain? The rule gives us the answer: He will, provided He can do so as our Father. If He can give us rain and at the same time be true to Himself, to us, and to our fellow-men, we shall have rain; otherwise we shall not have it, no matter what the circumstances may be.

As our Father, God requires us to go to Him in the spirit of a true child—the spirit in which His Son would go to Him. If we go to Him in this spirit and ask for rain, and He can give it to us without violating the demands of His own nature, or interfering with His plans for His kingdom or for humanity as a whole—if He can do so with due regard to our eternal interests and to the welfare of our neighbours—we may be sure that He will answer our prayer. The fact that science did not know fifty years ago how a heavier-than-air flying machine could be made to fly, and laughed at the idea as absurd, did not keep the Wrights from inventing a heavier-than-air flying machine. Science has discovered that the ma-

chinery of nature is provided with many wonderful means for meeting the needs of plants and animals in great emergencies or exigencies: surely if God has made such provision for mere plants and animals it would be foolish to insist that He has not done as much for His own children. If we should go to God for rain in accordance with the conditions which Christ requires, and it should happen to be a case in which God could answer us without being untrue either to Himself or to us or to our fellow-men, I can see no reason in anything that is known to science why He should not answer our prayer.

One might as well admit, however, that this is a large "if." No doubt it is possible for men and women to come together in a purely unselfish spirit and with great faith to pray for rain, having the Father's will and interests foremost and desiring the welfare of their fellow-men above their own gain; but as a matter of fact they don't usually come together in that way. I have known many good men and women to go to church to pray for rain, but I have never known one of them to carry an umbrella. Only little children ever suggest carrying an umbrella. Nor have I ever known a public prayer for rain to be preceded by a serious inquiry into what effect a downpour might have on the crops of the people living farther down the river. In a time of drouth we don't think of our neighbours' crops farther down the river.

This no doubt is the main secret of the failure of most of our spectacular community praying. Our united community prayers are not answered because our community does not unite in prayer. We have heard much of the united prayers of Christian America for a sick or wounded president, but there is no evidence that Christian America ever united in prayer for anybody. It is only a pious fiction, like the grave assurance occasionally given us in the newspapers that "the nation mourns." The assurance that the nation mourns is not given us as a statement of fact; it is put in type before the editor has a chance to find out whether the nation is mourning or not, and at best is only a delicate hint that the nation is expected to do the proper thing. Here and there a few devout folk pray and a few sympathetic people mourn, but Christian America as a whole is never still long enough to either pray or mourn.

III

We are often told that if it is God's will to do this or that particular thing for us it will be done, and that therefore the only important business before us when we would pray is to select for our petitions such things as are most likely to accord with His will. But God does not will to do this or that particular thing for us; He wills to do certain things for us on certain conditions, and a very important part of the business before us is

to inquire whether we have fulfilled the conditions. That half-grown tree, lying yonder uprooted upon the ground, may safely assure itself that it is God's will that it should resume its growth, but it may pray until doomsday and it will never begin to grow again if it does not return to its place where it can get back into harmony with law and thus meet the essential conditions of growth. So with the man who is out of harmony with God's will and has stopped growing toward true manhood—the manhood of a son of God. Unquestionably it is God's will that he should resume his growth, but he may pray until his breath fails and he will never add a hair's breadth to his spiritual stature if he does not return to his post of duty and get back into harmony with the will of God, which alone makes growth possible.

The little plant in my cellar is daily reaching out in supplication toward the light in harmony with law, and every day its prayers are answered. Every day it adds something to its stature. But suppose on to-morrow it should suddenly become human and self-willed, and in a fit of obstinacy should turn away from the light and insist upon pushing its way back into the dark. And suppose it should back its efforts with prayer. Suppose it could pray with the tongues of men and of angels. How far would it go? What good would its praying do?

Prayer is worth while only as we use it in har-

mony with the will of God. The moment we fall out of harmony with that will—the moment we insist upon going in the opposite direction—it becomes worthless. The united prayers of the whole Christian world cannot help my little cellar plant to grow if it insists upon turning away from the light; nor can they help me to grow if I insist upon turning away from The Light.

Coming into harmony with the will or law of God makes our growth possible because in harmonizing with Him we come in contact with Him. In other words we come in contact with the Source of Supply. But let us make no mistake. Contact with the Source of Supply does not mean free access to all the supplies we desire: it only means free access to the supplies we need. If an uprooted lily should be put back into its place and thus brought into harmony with law, it would be in contact with its sources of supply, but it would not have free access to all the supplies it might desire. It would only have access to the supplies it would need to achieve its destiny as a lily. It might conceive a desire to bring forth roses, and it might pray eloquently and fervently for the elements in the soil and air and light which it would need in order to blossom roses, but no rose would ever blossom. So, however perfectly we may come into harmony with God's law, we shall not have access to all the supplies we desire; we shall only have access to those supplies which we shall need to

achieve our destiny as men—sons of God. I have no assurance that God will make me rich if I want to become a philanthropist. I cannot be sure that He will make me eloquent if I want to proclaim the Good News of His Son. I cannot be sure that He will make me a poet if I want to write hymns of praise for His worship. But I may be absolutely sure that He is ready to supply me with everything I shall need to achieve my destiny as a son of God.

XIV

PRAYING TO BE HEALED

I

"ONE of the best women I ever knew was a sufferer for twenty years, and though she prayed without ceasing she never got any relief until she died."

"What I can't understand is that God should bless so many worthless people with good health and allow the best man I have ever known to be sick half of his time."

"The Christian people of America prayed for President Garfield and he died. They prayed for President McKinley and he died. Surely if there were anything in prayer ——"

"I used to believe in God, but since I have suffered so much I don't believe any more. There is my daughter Jane. Jane would give her life to save me from suffering. If there is a God why doesn't He pity me like Jane?"

And so on and so on. Everywhere it is the same old story. Everywhere it is the same old question. Since the day that pain first entered the world there has never been a time when men did not thrust their noses into one another's face and ask why. Why did God let pain come into the

world? Why didn't He make people so that they would not suffer? How could a good God allow His creatures to suffer?

Humanity has always been perplexed over the problem of suffering. And it has always been more or less querulous and petulant about it. Go where you will and the moment you approach a scene of suffering you will become conscious that the atmosphere is growing heavy with mystery. And it is seldom a mystery that awes you: the sufferer may be awed but the rest of us are only perplexed and annoyed. There is something about the sight of pain that upsets us. We grow impatient and querulous. Something has gone wrong and somebody is to blame. And in our petulance we like to indulge our suspicions. No doubt the sick man himself is partly to blame. And then there are his ancestors: probably they had something to do with it. And then there is God. Somehow we can't keep back the suspicion that it all goes back at last to God.

In an immortal document a master thinker of ancient times has left on record the not immodest claim that although when he was a child he "spake as a child" and "understood as a child" and "thought as a child," when he became a man he "put away childish things." I don't think I ever realized the full significance of this frank statement until I happened one day to set over against humanity's petulant questions about suffering the

record of this master thinker's own sufferings and his heroic utterances in regard to them. The world has progressed in many ways since Paul's day, but when it comes to clear thinking in the realm of the spirit it is still far behind that sturdy-minded Jew. In the sphere of matter we are thinking like men, but in the realm of the spirit we show no sign of having put away childish things. When Paul thought of pain he thought as a man —a man who could hold his hand in a flame without wincing, if need be. When the world of to-day thinks of pain it thinks like a child—like a child who is still smarting from his first spanking.

Ever since science set about the ambitious task of reducing human suffering to a minimum we have been basing all our reasoning about suffering upon the childish assumption that it is an evil —an unnecessary evil for which somebody other than ourselves is mainly to blame. Some of our sufferings we charge to our ancestors, some to our neighbours, some to God, and a few to ourselves; but in most of our thinking on the subject there is, as I have said, an undercurrent of suspicion that the blame for them all goes back at last to God. That at any rate is what we usually mean when in the presence of great suffering we shake our heads and say mournfully, "I can't understand it." It is simply a delicate way of saying that we don't understand why God did it.

It was inevitable that the race should have

started out with the theory that all suffering is evil—as inevitable as it was that our little John should start out with it. And it was just as inevitable that it should have quickly reached the conclusion that it is something for which somebody or something other than ourselves is mainly to blame. Little children are given to sage remarks, but I have never known a little child who had just bumped his head against the floor to rise with the remark that it was his own fault and that it would do him good. To the child's mind pain is something that comes from without, therefore something which should be charged to somebody or something other than himself. Why should he punish himself for falling upon the floor? Why should he not punish the floor for flying up and hitting him?

Nearly all of our reasoning about suffering that begins with "I can't understand why," etc., is simply a translation into adult speech of the childish argument that begins with the assumption that the bump one gets is an evil and straightway jumps to the conclusion that the floor is to blame for it.

II

In the study of the human body our scientific age has learned that suffering, instead of being an evil, is in many cases the best thing that can happen. As a danger signal pain has no equal. It is the only warning that you can always depend upon.

It will stop the deaf. It will stop the blind. It will stop a self-willed child. It is about the only thing that will stop a self-willed child. If one could stick one's fingers into the fire without pain most of the race would burn up in infancy. Moreover we have learned that suffering, instead of being a law of death, as we used to think, is a law of life. We have learned that it is not the process of dying that causes pain, but the process of living. All physical life is a struggle against death, and where there is struggle pain is inevitable. That poor fellow who suffered so much the other night with his broken leg that he almost despaired of living until morning, did not suffer because death was getting the upper hand, but because life was getting the upper hand. The bone had begun to knit.

These things we have received on the authority of science and we never think of questioning them. Science tells us that suffering occupies an important place in the physical life and we believe it. Science tells us that the man who saves his life—who coddles and shields himself—his hands, his feet, his muscles, his mind—from wear and tear and heat and cold and strain and endurance—from every effort or sacrifice that brings pain—loses what little life he has, and we believe it. Science tells us that it is the man who is willing to lose his life who saves it, and we believe it. We have no difficulty in accepting any of these things

so long as they relate to our physical life and are given to us in the name of science. And yet when we Christians are asked to believe, on the authority of Jesus, that suffering occupies an equally important place in the spiritual world, that he that saveth his physical life shall lose his spiritual life and that he who is willing to lose his physical life shall save his spiritual life—when we are asked to believe these things on the authority of the Master Teacher Himself, although they are in full harmony with science and are confirmed by the spiritual experience of mankind in all ages—we petulantly stop our ears and shake our heads like unreasoning children. And in our petulance we speak and understand and think as unreasoning children. We insist that as pain makes one cross and irritable, and unfits one for either work or play it is only an evil, and we want to know what God could have been thinking about when He planned things so that floors would fly up and bump people's heads.

No wonder the world's experience in praying for the sick has been one long-drawn-out tragedy. No wonder it has caused so many people to lose their grip on their religious faith. No wonder it has so often driven even devout souls to the brink of despair. Imagine what would happen if the world should suddenly begin to speak and understand and think as a child over some problem of our material life. Take the problem of surgery for

example. Should a doctor be allowed to cut people with his knife? Suppose we should suddenly begin to think over this question from the point of view of a little child: what conclusion would we reach? What would we think of this business of cutting into people's bodies? What would we think of the surgeon's knife? And—heavens!—what would we think of the surgeon?

This is our trouble to-day. We think of our material problems as men, but we think of our spiritual problems as little children, and suffering is a spiritual problem. The world is like a little child lying bound upon an operating table. The child has a weak heart and must undergo an operation without ether. The bandage upon his eyes slips, and the little fellow catches a glimpse of the surgeon approaching the table with his scalpel. The world to-day goes into a frenzy at the sight of suffering and cries out against it and says foolish things about it and prays foolish prayers about it, for the same reason that the child upon the operating table screams out at the approach of the surgeon with his knife. In the realm of the spirit the world is a child, and it speaks and understands and thinks about suffering as a child.

III

Do I mean to say that all of our praying for deliverance from suffering is foolish? No. And

for the simple reason that all suffering is not like a surgeon's knife. There is a great deal of suffering in the world that does not bring good to the souls of men and there is no reason why we should not pray to be delivered from it. There is no reason why we should not seek to get rid of all needless pain. Nevertheless it is unquestionable that pain is playing a very important part in God's program for the development of the race to spiritual manhood, and we should no more seek to get rid of the pain that is doing good than we should cry out against the summer's heat or the winter's cold or the fierce March winds, or the endless May rains, or the woodman's axe, or the vinedresser's knife, or the farmer's plow and harrow that are doing good. Many a sickness has transformed a spiritual wilderness into a rich harvest field. Many a pain has broken up the hard surface of a heart that has ceased to respond to any call of God. Many a sudden misfortune has turned a poor miserable failure into a man. Nobody imagines that in such cases God would have stopped the pain or reversed the misfortune in answer to prayer. One might as well expect Him to halt the painful processes of nature that are necessary to a harvest in answer to prayer. One might as well expect a faithful surgeon to throw down his knife in the midst of an operation in answer to prayer. If a thorn in the flesh is developing a man's courage, his patience, his power of endur-

ance, his willingness to suffer for God or fellowman, it is foolish to imagine that the Father, who loves His children too well to indulge them, will remove the thorn in answer to prayer and thus spoil the man in the making. There is but one thing a faithful earthly father will do for his suffering child under such circumstances; he will do what he can to make the pain bearable and let the thorn stay until it has done its work. And that we may be sure is the only thing the heavenly Father will do under such circumstances. That was all He did for Paul—He let the thorn stay and gave him enough grace to make the pain bearable; and Paul, let us remember, was as good a child and as valuable a servant as the heavenly Father ever had, except One.

The Father will not remove a pain that is helping His child on toward spiritual manhood, no matter how earnestly he may pray to be relieved from it. Only an indulgent father could do that, and God is not an indulgent father. To say that He would make all of our sick loved ones well if we would only pray with faith is to say that He would imperil the souls of our sick loved ones if we were only foolish enough to believe that He would do it. It is to say that He is willing to deprive Himself of one of the most valuable material means He has ever used to help His children achieve their destiny as sons of God. It is to say that He is willing, in order to gratify His children

and stop them from crying, to suspend His program and let His whole plan for the salvation of the race fall to the ground.

For say what we will, the human race will never be saved without suffering. It will not be saved by suffering—only Christ can save it—but it must suffer. Suffering occupies such a large place in God's program that if He should take it out He would have to make a new program: the old one would fall to pieces. If He should abolish suffering He would have to abolish the law, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap"—which would mean destruction for the greater part of the race. Hundreds of millions of people, finding that they could indulge in sin without paying the penalty of physical pain, would plunge headlong into vice and go to the dogs before the year was out. And this is not all: He would have to abolish everything that causes pain, however essential it might be to the development of the race—all the painful exercises and struggles and sacrifices which develop the physical, mental and spiritual powers of man—thus condemning the race to an everlasting, puny, spineless babyhood in the cradle of sheer animalism, hopelessly removed from the Kingdom of God.

IV

Unquestionably suffering is essential to the development of the race. And unquestionably God

is not going to answer every prayer for its removal, no matter how earnestly we may pray. Nevertheless it is true that there is a great deal of suffering in the world that is unnecessary and harmful, and certainly we may pray for the removal of that which is unnecessary and harmful.

If I have been sick for sometime and my failure to recover is due to my own carelessness, it is clear that my sickness is harmful. I am wasting precious time which God gave me for my work and I am sinning against Him every day I neglect to use the means which have been provided for my recovery. Clearly I have no right to continue sick and I should at once beg God to forgive me and to make me well, and then proceed to use as intelligently and faithfully as possible the means He has given me for my recovery.

If I have a pain which is clearly a danger signal, I may pray to God to remove it, but not before I have taken advantage of the warning the signal has given me. If I have been indifferent to the laws of physical health (which are as truly God's laws as the laws of spiritual health), and am sick in consequence, it is useless to pray to God to make me well until I have fallen in with these laws to the best of my knowledge and ability, and assured Him that I am determined to obey them in the future. If I have been indifferent to His moral laws and am sick in body or mind or soul in consequence, I must follow a like course, or my prayers

will be in vain. If I am not going to profit by the danger signals which God has set up for me along the road of life, I have no more right to expect to be delivered from danger than I would have if I should refuse to profit by the danger signals which men have set up for me at the railroad crossings.

But a sickness may be something more than a warning. Sometimes it is an opportunity. And this may be the case whether it was brought on by wilful disobedience or by unconscious disobedience. If I brought on my sickness by wilful disobedience it is an opportunity to get back into harmony with God. In such a case I should not ask God to make me well until I have used my sickness as an opportunity to get back into harmony with Him. It will be adding insult to injury to ask God to cure my disease before I have asked Him to forgive the sin that brought it on. My first step is to get back into harmony with God and until I do this I had better stay sick. If a man does not fall in with God while lying flat on his back, he is not likely to fall in with Him when he gets on his feet.

On the other hand if my sickness is not the result of wilful disobedience I may pray for recovery, but I should not pray for a quick recovery unless it is clear (which is not likely to be the case) that it is more important for me to get well quickly than to stay sick a while. If in my sickness I am thinking less of self and more of God

and my fellow-men, if my spiritual vision is growing clearer, if I am beginning to see things as they are, if the path of duty is growing plainer before me, surely I can afford to stay sick a while. If my sickness is making a man of me I can well afford to stay sick a while. The truth is, it is difficult to see how we are ever going to develop to manhood nowadays if we are not required to spend a little while on our backs occasionally. Frankly I cannot see how we are going to develop to real manhood if we are going to continue to spend all our days in a maelstrom of blinding matter, as most of us are doing just now. We must go off to some quiet spot where we can lie flat on our backs and look up to God. And if we will not go of our own will, something must come along and take us by the ear and lead us off. I can think of nothing that some very busy men I know need more than an occasional attack of sickness that will put them to bed and keep them flat on their backs long enough to get them into the habit of looking up.

Surely I do not need to add that all through our suffering we must use prayer not merely as a means of getting back our health, but also and mainly as a means of keeping in vital contact with the Blessed Healer and Comforter Himself. We must pray until praying becomes as natural as breathing. But in all our praying we must remember that God challenges us as heroes, not as babies, and when we speak to Him of our pain

we must quit ourselves like men. I may ask Him to soothe my quivering nerves, but I may not ask Him to keep the temperature at seventy degrees. I may ask Him to quiet my aching heart, but I may not ask Him to indulge my weaknesses. I may ask Him to lay His hand on my wildly throbbing brain so that I may look out calmly on life, but I may not ask Him to excuse me and let me run away from life. I may ask Him to lay His hand on my care-worn spirit and take the weariness out of it, but I may not ask Him to relieve me of all duty while I am suffering, so that I may not get tired. I may ask Him to bring light to my mind in the midst of my perplexities and to help me with life's mysteries, but I may not ask Him to relieve me of the duty of thinking. I may tell Him of my nervousness and of the flurry and worry and care in my heart, but I must tell Him, not with the hope that He will coddle me like a baby, but that He may give me what I really need—the peace of the Son of God whose spirit was never ruffled by the storms that swept over His life.

And we must pray with thanksgiving. It was a little thing that I should thank Him for the springtime with its sunshine, its showers, its melodies of birds, its beautiful flowers: now I must do better. I must thank Him—really thank Him—for the winter that has come down upon me—the winter with its storms, its cold northeasters and its leaden

skies. I have thanked Him for health and for pleasant times, though they have often led me to forget Him: now I must thank Him for the sickness and the hard times that have driven me to remember Him. And when at last the storm is over and I am safe in the midst of a great calm, I must thank Him for the peace that has come to me at last.

And that is not all. Every day while the tempest blew I thought I should be wrecked, and now that it is all over I can see that all the while the winds and the waves and my little shaky boat and I myself were all in the hollow of His hand. And so I must beg Him to forgive my foolish fears, and to so fill my heart with His strength that I may take up the thread of my work-day life again with a firm hand, and face the future with confidence and cheer.

XV

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

I

"I KNOW a good woman who prayed steadily for her drunken husband for twenty years and he never drew a sober breath."

"And I know a good man who had a vixen for a wife and he almost wore his knees out praying for her conversion and nothing ever came of it."

"And I know a saintly mother who has been praying for her boy ever since he was born. She sits up every night until two or three o'clock waiting for him to come home, and prays all through those lonely hours, and the other night when he came reeling home drunk and found her on her knees asleep, he pulled her up by her hair and dragged her around the room. I just can't understand it."

And so on and so on. Of course all this is mere hearsay evidence and most of it is sheer drivel; nevertheless one must admit that it is horribly depressing. It is so depressing that we don't care to think about it. And we don't think about it: we only shake our heads and try to think of something else.

Here, it seems to me, is the secret of most of our perplexity, confusion and despair over the problem of praying for others. We don't think about it. We think of prayers for others, but we don't think of the problem of praying for others. One of the strangest things about the present age is its hopeless attitude toward spiritual problems of every sort. It is marvellously expert in straightening out material and intellectual tangles, but when it comes upon a spiritual tangle it immediately assumes that it is hopeless and refuses to take a second look at it. As if all tangles did not look hopeless at the first glance!

A single moment's thought over any one of the cases I have just mentioned would start some questions, and asking questions is like pulling deftly and gently at a tangled skein. For example, it would start the question whether our informant might not have assumed too much. How did he know, for instance, that the good woman who had been going to God in behalf of her husband had been really praying—that is, praying in the spirit and way which God requires of His supplicants? How did he know that she was really in harmony with God, or was making an earnest attempt to get into harmony with God? How did he know that she was not trying to get God to come into harmony with herself? How did he know that she prayed with a forgiving spirit, without which one cannot really pray at all? Do we not happen to

know another good woman who seemed to be praying just as earnestly for her husband, and who never wearied of reminding us that she never could and never would forgive the liquor seller who first led her husband astray?

And how did our informant know that she did all that she could to help answer her own prayer; that she had faithfully coöperated with God by using all the means He had given her to bring about the reformation of her husband? I have known good women who prayed for their drinking husbands at night and regularly drove them to drink the next morning. How did our informant know that she had done her best to smooth the way toward a sober life for her husband? And how did he know that she had made the most of her love and her beauty to draw him in the direction of a sober life? Love and beauty have drawn men through fire and flood to the ends of the earth; they have drawn men down to hell; they have drawn men up to heaven; is it not possible that if this good woman had used the love and beauty Heaven had given her in helping God answer her own prayer, she might have drawn her husband away from drink to a sober life? Is it possible that she dishonoured God by neglecting these charms until both had wasted away and left her nothing with which to draw her husband upward?

And how did our informant know that God

could have answered her prayer regardless of her husband's will in the matter? How did he know that God could treat her husband like a tin soldier and pick him up out of the gutter and stand him upright and force him to stand upright for the rest of his life?

II

There are other questions one might ask, but there is no need to go further. Certainly we have gone far enough to reach the conclusion that the problem of praying for others, however serious it may be, is by no means a hopeless tangle. The truth is its tangled appearance is largely due to a very simple matter. It is largely due to the fact that we have overlooked the essential difference between the problem of praying for others and the problem of praying for ourselves. If my son John asks of me a favour for himself, there are certain things I must consider; but if he asks a favour for Robert, there are certain additional things I must consider. It is not enough to take a look at John's mind and heart and life; I must also take a look at Robert's mind and heart and life. So when I ask a favour of the Father for my neighbour I have no right to expect Him to grant it simply because of what He sees in me; I must expect Him to consider my neighbour also.

It is this strange oversight that is largely responsible for the fact that our experience in praying for

others is on the whole so much more unsatisfactory than our experience in praying for ourselves. Somehow when we go to God for our fellow-man it seldom occurs to us that it may be just as necessary for certain conditions to be fulfilled in them as it is for certain conditions to be fulfilled in us. Usually we ask God to make a good boy of John as if it were wholly a matter between God and ourselves and John had no "say" or part in it at all.

But John does have a say or part in the matter, and until we recognize this fact our experience in praying for others will continue to be as it is today—one of the dreariest and most desolate chapters in our spiritual history. God answers the prayers of men for others, but He answers them as a good, wise and loving father answers the prayers of his children; and a good, wise and loving father cannot in the nature of things answer John's prayer for Robert without considering Robert as well as John.

And when the Father of us all considers those we pray for as well as ourselves He comes upon some very serious limitations which His character or nature has placed about Himself. When we ask Him to reform a drinking husband or to convert a worldly wife or to make John a good boy, we bring before Him the inescapable fact that He made us moral beings and not tin soldiers, and that having given us the power to choose between good and evil He cannot run roughshod over our will and

force us to choose what He would have us choose. No matter how good and how faithful to God I may be, or how earnestly I may pray to Him to make John a good boy, God is not going to violate the moral nature which He has given to John. He could not do it if He would. God cannot be untrue to Himself and He cannot be untrue to the creatures He has made.

Besides, God cannot do that which is a contradiction in terms. He cannot recognize a law and violate it in the same breath. He cannot give man freedom of will and then force him to choose according to another will. There is no such thing as a forced choice, just as there is no such thing as forced goodness. If God, after making John a moral being—after giving him power to choose between right and wrong and making him responsible for his choice—should interfere in answer to my prayer and force John to be good, He would take the responsibility for John's conduct upon His own shoulders and John would cease to be a moral being. And that means, of course, that God would not make John good at all. How much goodness is there in forced goodness? How could we call John a good boy if he behaved himself not from choice but because he could not help himself?

III

It may be remarked just here that if what I have said is true, it is hardly worth while for us to pray

for others at all. But this does not follow. It is just as much worth while to pray for others as it is to pray for ourselves. It is true that in praying for others about a matter in which their moral nature is involved, the probability of an answer is not so great as in praying for ourselves, for the reason that there are more conditions to be fulfilled; but all prayers for others are not of this sort, and even if they were it would still be worth while to pray for others. If a mother should ask God to spare the life of her sick baby, He would not have to consider her baby's freedom of will, for the reason that it has not yet arrived at the age of moral responsibility. But even in that case God could not answer her prayer without regard to her baby's welfare. He has placed Himself under obligations to do that which is best for her baby's eternal welfare, and no amount of pleading could induce Him to ignore that obligation.

Is it worth while then to pray to God to reform a drinking husband, to convert a worldly wife, to make John a good boy? Yes, if we pray for them as moral beings. If we are hoping that God will take the drinking husband in His hands and make him sober and upright regardless of his own will, as a child would pick up a prostrate tin soldier from the floor and set him upright against the wall, our prayers will not be worth while. If we are hoping that God will perform a miracle to make the worldly wife sick of the world and to fill her

heart with a passion for the things of the spirit regardless of her will, our prayers will not be worth while. If we are hoping that God, as a reward for our goodness or for our persistence in prayer or for anything else, will make John a good boy regardless of whether John wants to be a good boy or not, our prayers will not be worth while. But if our prayers mean simply that we want God to do all that an infinitely good, wise and loving father can do for a wayward child, without being untrue to himself, or to the child or to his other children, they will be just as much worth while as any prayer that we can pray for ourselves. We have no right to expect God to save John regardless of John's own will, but we may expect Him in answer to our prayers (if we pray aright and cooperate with Him by using the means He has already given us to aid in the work of saving John) to shed more light into John's mind and to surround him with gracious influences which will help to smooth the way for him if he should choose to forsake the wrong for the right.

And so far as we can see this is as far as God can go in the matter. No matter how earnestly we may pray He is not going to treat John as a tin soldier and make him stand upright whether or no. Why should He? You may pick up a tin soldier and stand him upright and he may stay upright; but what would such uprightness be worth?

XVI

WHAT PRAYER DOES FOR US

I

IF I have correctly interpreted the Master's teaching it goes without saying that there is one question about prayer which can never be settled by testing, and that is the question of profit. Whether it pays to pray can never be determined by any number of tests for the simple reason that one cannot pray for pay. When the thought of profit enters at the door the spirit of prayer flies out at the window.

When one is moved to pray for pay one is moved by greed, and greed is a deadly enemy of prayer—as deadly as an unforgiving spirit. It makes no difference how earnestly we may be engaged in prayer, the moment the idea of gain enters our minds our praying ends. Our hearts cannot reach out for God and gain at the same time.

It is no more worth while for a man to attempt to get into harmony with God with an eye to getting what he wants, than it is for a disobedient child to attempt to get into harmony with his father with an eye to getting what he wants. It is less worth while, for even disobedient children can

fool some fathers, while no man can fool God. Nevertheless it pays to pray. We cannot prove it because, as I have indicated, it is an impossible experiment; but we know it all the same. It does not pay to cultivate the Father's friendship from a selfish motive, but there is no end to the good that may come to us if we cultivate His friendship without a thought of whether any good will come from it or not.

What does a child get from unselfishly cultivating his father's friendship?

To put it in a word, he gets the full benefit of having a father. The poorest boy I know is a boy who never has anything to do with his father. An involuntary orphan is pathetic, but his case is not half so bad as that of a boy who deliberately makes himself an orphan. True, he gets something: he still gets his three meals a day and something to wear; but no homeless orphan, however hungry or ragged he may be, is in half so sad a plight as he. People call him an unnatural boy, and no wonder; for he is utterly out of harmony with nature. And he is not growing. His body is growing, but the boy himself is a poor, unsightly, stunted creature with little prospect of ever attaining to manhood. A boy who never goes to his father or to some one who takes the place of a father, may still get his three meals a day, but he is starving to death. He is cheating himself out of everything his father can give him for the development of his mind and

spirit, his character, his manhood—everything that is permanently worth while.

Suppose such a boy should suddenly wake up and should begin to go to his father as a true son. What would happen? First of all he would fall in with his father. Gradually he would get closer to him in body, then in mind, then in spirit. He would fall in with his father's will. He would fall in with his father's ways of thinking. He would fall in with his father's ideals. By and by he would come into such complete harmony with his father that every part of his being would be in vital contact with him, and the best riches of his father's mind and spirit would be open to him.

Something like this happens to the child of God who forms the habit of going to his heavenly Father to unbosom himself to Him.

II

We usually think of prayer as something that has to do mainly with one's daily bread. But a boy rarely finds it necessary to go to his father for his daily bread. Usually a father will see to it that his children are provided with bread whether they ask for it or not. The worst boy in the family—the boy who never goes to his father for anything—usually gets his bread along with the rest of his children. And it is the same way with men. God sends His sunshine and rain upon the unjust as well as upon the just, and usually those who never go to

Him get their bread along with the rest. Nevertheless they are the poorest people in the world. Sometimes they get more bread than the best of the children, but they are poor all the same, just as the worst boy in the family, who sometimes manages to get more bread than the rest of the children, is poor all the same. It is not our bread problem that makes prayer so important. A child of God prays for his daily bread, but he is more concerned about the bread he needs for his spirit than the bread he needs for his body. He knows that many people who never go to God for anything get just as much bread as those who never fail to go to Him. But the man who never goes to God never gets anything more. He may get all that he needs for his material life, but that is all. Just as an earthly father cannot do anything more for the boy who never comes to him than supply his material wants, so God cannot do anything more for those who do not come to Him than supply their material wants. To get the best things a father can provide—the things a boy needs most—one must go to him and get into harmony with him as his son; and to get the best things the heavenly Father can provide—the things we need most for all eternity —we must go to Him and get into harmony with Him as His children. Animals don't need to pray and if we want nothing but what animals want—things that perish with their using—we may not need to pray; but if we want the things that men—

sons of God—immortal spirits—want, we shall have to pray. It is the only way to get them.

But it is a sure way. Just as it is impossible for a loving son to habitually go to a good father to unbosom himself to him without receiving from him that which will help him to become a true man like his father, so it is impossible for a loving child of God to habitually go to the Father to unbosom himself to Him without receiving from Him all that he needs for his development to the manhood of a son of God.

XVII

ONE WORD THAT SETTLES ALL

I

THERE are two kinds of questions which we ask about prayer—the questions we ask in our heads and the questions we ask in our hearts. To all our head questions—all the questions we ask from the viewpoint of science or reason—there is one answer which, when clearly understood, completely satisfies both science and reason. That answer is the scientific fact which underlies the promise of Jesus, "If ye will ask anything in my name I will do it." This fact is that everything in creation, including man, on coming into harmony with law, comes into vital communication with the sources of supply. All the objections to prayer that have been offered by materialistic scientists vanish before this simple fact. The materialistic scientist does not see this—apparently because he shares the popular misapprehension of the meaning of prayer. He thinks of prayer as the effort of men who are out of harmony with law to persuade God to make His will conform to their desires, and to his mind this is absurd. And he is right. It is impossible for an intelligent mind, whether it is a scientific mind or not, to conceive of

God as bending or breaking His law to bring it into harmony with the desires or whims of one of His creatures. But, as I have tried to show, this is not prayer. Prayer is not the effort of a lawless or self-willed man to bend God's law to his will. That is not only unscientific; it is absurd. A lawless man cannot pray. The thief on the cross was lawless before he prayed, but not when he prayed. He did not begin to pray until he had repented—until his mind and heart had turned away from his lawlessness. Prayer is not like the cry of a plant that has been uprooted and torn away from harmony with law; it is like the effort of a plant trying to bring itself more perfectly into harmony with law by pushing its roots a little farther down into the soil and opening the pores of its leaves wider in accordance with the demands of that law.

But it is quite possible to answer all of one's intellectual questions about prayer and at the same time leave one's heart questions unsettled, and as everybody knows it is even more important to satisfy our hearts than it is to satisfy our intellects. Happily Jesus has come to our help in this matter also. In a single word He has given us the answer to every question that the human heart has ever asked about prayer. That word is—

Father.

There may be exceptions to this rule, as there are to most rules, but I have never found one. Recall one by one all the anxious questions about prayer

that ever came up in your heart, including those you never dared to utter aloud, and note how readily and how completely and satisfyingly this one word answers them all. What reason have I to believe that God has provided a way to communicate with Him? There is but one finally satisfying answer in the world to this question, and that answer is *Father.* If I had no assurance that God is my Father nothing could satisfy my heart on that point. If God is not my Father I can see no important reason why He should have provided a way for me to get into touch with Him. On the other hand, if He is my Father, I can conceive of no important reason why He should not have provided a way for me to get into touch with Him. It is impossible for me to conceive that a true father would deliberately shut up his child in a strange room, hermetically seal up the door on both sides and leave him to himself for his whole natural life. It is absurd to say that the Omnipotent One is our Father and with our next breath insist that He has never spoken to us and could not provide a way to speak to us if He could.

II

So with all the other questions which our hearts are asking about prayer. Take the following for example: What assurance have I that God is sufficiently interested in me to listen to my prayer? There is one answer that will satisfy my heart and

only one. He is my Father. How do I know that He is not too deeply engrossed in the great affairs of the universe to look after my little wants? The answer is the same: He is my Father. What father is too busy with the great affairs of this life to look after the wants of his children? Can we depend upon God to do for us all that infinite love and infinite wisdom may prompt Him to do? Yes, He is our Father. Has God made any arbitrary rules about prayer? No, He is our Father. What father worthy of the name would make arbitrary rules to govern his children? Does God place Himself at our disposal to do just as we would have Him do? No; He is our Father. What father would surrender his will to his children? Can we gain anything by telling God that we will be good if He will do thus and so? No; He is our Father. What father would make such a bargain with his children? Can God answer our prayers as an autocrat answers the petitions of his subjects? No; He is our Father. How can a true father be an autocrat? Why does God give more to the wicked than to the good? God does not give more to the wicked than to the good. He is our Father. Does a father do more for his disobedient children than for those who obey Him? But why does God give to the wicked at all? Why does He send His rain and sunshine upon the unjust as well as upon the just? Because He is our Father. Does a father arrange things so that only

those of his children who obey him shall share the bread which he provides for his family? It is not because God does more for the wicked than for the good that the wicked so often have more than the good; it is because the wicked selfishly use what He gives them to enrich themselves, while the good devote themselves and what He gives them to His interests and the welfare of their fellow-men.

If all this is true—if all our heart questions about prayer are answered the moment we think of God as our Father—it would seem to follow that these questions at bottom are not questions about prayer at all, but questions about God. That is to say, when we thus express our doubts about prayer we are really expressing our doubts about God. We are uncertain about our prayers because we are not certain about Him to whom we pray.

If this is true then our duty is plain. When we are troubled with doubts about prayer we should not be content to go only to the teachings of Jesus: we should go to Jesus. The Master has given to men the only satisfying view of prayer because He was able to give them the only satisfying view of God. It is not sufficient, therefore, that we should learn from His teachings that prayer is the unbosoming of ourselves to our heavenly Father; we must go to Him as our Saviour and Lord, and let Him show us the Father's face.

In the light of that face we shall be satisfied.

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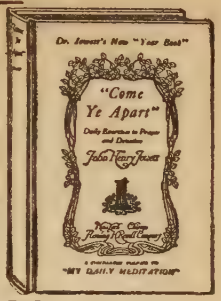

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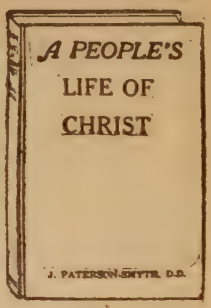

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